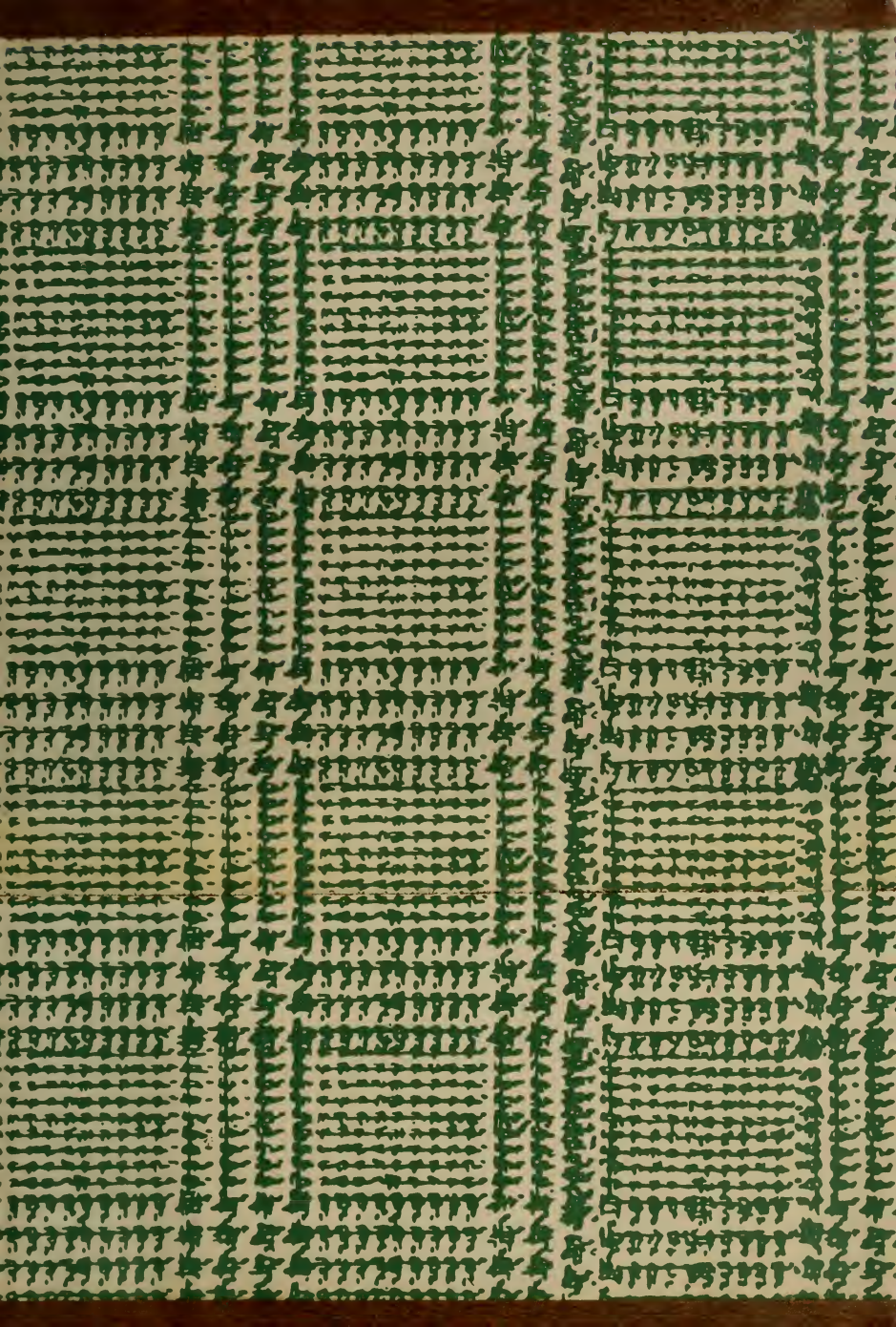

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THE TREASURE OF HO

THE TREASURE OF HO

A ROMANCE

BY

L. ADAMS BECK

Author of "The Key of Dreams,"
"The Perfume of the Rainbow," etc.

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(The Treasure of Ho is historical, nor have I exaggerated its enormous value. Many of the incidents of this romance are historical also, and the so-called magical events have been seen and authenticated by travellers in the Orient for many generations past and down to the present day.)

THE TREASURE OF HO

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CHAPTER I

CHINA and the Western Hills far beyond Peking and the strangest experience of my life. When I hear the name of China—when I read it even in the trodden-out routine of the daily press, a picture rises before me, and this is it.

Summer laying a leaden weight of heat over the dry parched city—the smells, the dust unbearable; life and work a load to be shouldered and dragged on somehow—anyhow; dust storms blowing at every breath of wind along the crowded streets, and the dust of Peking is, to say the politest of it, unwholesome; and, on top of all this, day in, day out the grind that leaves a man bleached and irritable and sick of the world at large and Peking in particular.

Well, I had got to that stage. It took all my self-control to keep the office work going, and I was in the Customs, and the Customs can be uncommonly trying to a man's temper. The endless Chinese delays and unbusinesslike ways—but what is the use of talking? I was sick of it all and praying for my holidays, and when they came I had made up my mind that I would go away alone—not to Wei-hai-wei, nor any of the European play places, but off to a happy solitude, restful, self-centred: and then I would begin—what I knew was a folly, only

it happened to please me—a little book on the early Korean potteries. Of course it has been done a hundred times and by men who knew a deal more than I shall know if I live to be a thousand, but a man must have a hobby, and that was mine.

So I sounded my boy Yin as to a retreat, and he, in profound amazement at my thirst for solitude, sounded somebody else, and the chain went on until I heard of a little lost Buddhist temple beyond the western hills on the heights where a priest would let a couple of rooms gladly if he could find any one to take them. It seemed that no one ever did; it was so far away and so dull. I must say they were perfectly candid about that. Indeed it was so solitary that even the tide of worship had long since drifted away from the August Peace Temple and except for a few wandering peasants it was left to itself entirely. But there it was, and Yin, who was by no means anxious I should go, on being pressed could not deny that the country round was most beautiful and that the fishing in the river under the crags was not to be despised. Also, he added, the priest was a very learned man who knew all about the days of the ancestors.

Just the bait for me. I determined at once to go there.

Now I must explain myself a bit because that has a bearing on what happened.

I am John Mallerdean and in the Customs, and China is hereditary in my family. Just as in India you get generations of men where son succeeds father in the Army or the Civil Service, so in China there have been

Mallerdeans ever since the door was opened. And before.

I believe my great-great-uncle was the first. He got a foot in, how nobody knows, about a hundred and fifty years ago—the sort of man who earlier would have been called a "gentleman adventurer," for he went out to India to make his fortune and there disappeared and his father heard no more of him until he turned up in China, and there it was a family tradition that by a knowledge of medicine he cured the Emperor Ch'ien-lung of an attack of gout which had exasperated the Imperial temper to such fury that no one else dared suggest a remedy. And he had written back to his father by a Dutch trading ship that he had gained great rewards and was high in favour, having received a gold tablet which enabled him to move about China as he pleased—an almost impossible thing then and later.

There was also a kind of notion handed down that he acted more or less as an agent of the Emperor in his dealings with England and France, but whether it were true or not I was never able to make out. There certainly was a good deal of intrigue going on at the time about the opening of ports to trade, and so on, but nobody in the family really knew anything. One thing I was always sure of: If one could write that man's adventures it would be good reading. He was the real type of the gentleman-adventurer of the period and the century before, seeking his fortune where he could find it, but in honourable ways for all that!

His few letters (and it may be supposed mails from

China were irregular!) were reserved and a bit stilted according to the fashion of the times, but there was the character of an honourable man in them so far as they went. They dried up altogether when his father died in Exeter, and nothing more was known. His name, like mine, was John Mallerdean, and ever since his day there has been a Mallerdean in China. We made it our happy hunting ground, and so I took up the running when my turn came, and had done pretty well out of it in the humdrum way one does things nowadays. We all knew our China. It was in the Mallerdean blood.

I think that's all I need say of the past or present. I resolved I would make a walking trip of it when I got to a certain point in the hills, and started there early on a cloudless day, having sent my baggage on before. Yin was with me to show the way, which was uncommonly hard to find. How on earth can I describe the beauty of that tramp among the hills? People talk of North China as a dusty arid place of graves. They simply don't know —they are not in it! The flowering shrubs— Did these people ever stop to think why China is called the "Flowery Empire"? Not they!

But the wild wood jasmines were out, and the fragrance of their thick white blossoms—almost like a tuberose for scent—filled the air. You could not have stood it in the house, but out of doors it was heavenly—and as good to look at as to smell, with its white constellations of flowers. And the mimosas! Talk of the mimosas on the Riviera! Here they were great trees in glory—a powdery spray of gold trembling all over the boughs with the sombre leaves for a background. I could not get

along for them at first—I simply had to stop and stare and marvel. And every feathery flower exhaled its heart in passionate perfume—calling upon the blue hills and the perfect sky to rejoice in its joy.

Ah, well; we live in a very decent world if we could only leave it as we find it. But we can't. Two years after the time I write of the Boxer business came and took the lid off hell.

But that day it was heaven, and the days that followed. I got higher and higher up the hills, and slept at the little temples we found on the way. Like all the Mallerdeans, I am not bad at languages, and my colloquial Chinese was a lift to me in the Customs and everywhere else.

We seemed to have got above the heat cloud that dominated the city and its surroundings and the air was pure and fresh—and the peasants we met on the way frankly good-natured big fellows, industrious almost to a fault. They liked to stop and have a word, and if I had a cigarette to spare—why, that was a boon that implied such distinguished foreign rank that all the poor fellows had was at my service. They had not much!

So we went on, and on the fourth day we reached a more mountainous district. Not that it was very high up, but those were the great wild crags beloved of Chinese artists, and a narrow rushing river that told of snow in the heights, and crowding about it silent pines that seemed to meditate all human fate in their dark solitudes.

"The Temple of the August Peace is up there," said Yin, pointing to a narrow climbing trail between the

pines, "and if my respected master will be seated and eat his tiffin, this insignificant slave will now prepare it."

He could not have chosen a more attractive place—the Chinese I have come across certainly have that instinct for beauty which the Western peasant seems to lack. I sat down among the mossy rocks with the tumbling rejoicing water at my feet and the canopy of a sheltering pine above; and there from the neatest little woven basket Yin unfolded a really very decent spread, and a prepossessing bottle of beer which he put in an icy gush of the river to cool. Then, respectfully retiring behind another rock, he fell to himself.

I ate hungrily and finished up with delicious fruit—and a sense of summer calm over me, not entirely unconnected with a comfortable feeling of repletion. I lit my pipe and stared at the ceaseless change and never-change of the river. It had been singing that song of ripple and rush before the Manchu dynasty sat on the celestial throne, before the Mings, before history itself. Had life ever penetrated to those green silences where one could at most picture a wandering monk on his way to the hidden temple, or the distant sound of its bronze bell dropping from the heights? There could never have been any tempest of human passion in this quiet. Life would be a dreaming sweetness punctuated with prayers and the soft booming of the great bell from above.

I fell asleep for awhile in the midst of my drowsy visions and Yin mercifully spared my slumbers, as he gathered up the fragments noiselessly and put all in order and sat down to wait with Chinese patience until my greatness should awake.

It was late when I awoke and I quickened up my steps on the climb, like a giant refreshed; and yet a queer feeling that must have begun in my sleep climbed with me and seemed to assure me that I knew the place. I didn't in the least. How then did it seem familiar to me when we turned a scarp and came on a waterfall? The melodious thunder had haunted us for the last half hour. It flung itself down a gorgeous precipice between black pines—narrow, but so steep that the river was a maddening creature of the wilds leaping for life from some pursuing terror behind. No doubt of it—some horror sat up in the mountains, and the water skirted it trembling, and then ran—rushed for its life, bruising and breaking itself into diamond spray in the fall.

"It is called 'The Flying Tiger,' " Yin observed sententiously. And, oddly enough the name was not strange either to me. Queer—I recalled the lines:

> "I have been here before,
> But how, I cannot tell."

" 'The Flying Tiger,' " I said. "Then that comes from the Jade Spring up in the Two Dragon Mountains."

Yin agreed, looking surprised at my knowledge. But not nearly so surprised as myself. Of course I had read it somewhere and forgotten.

"It is magic water up there," he said. "Long ago was a great sage, like Lao-tze himself, and he drank always of that spring, so that it became full of wisdom—and those who drink of the water up there become wise also and see hidden things; but lower down than here, it loses its virtue when men use it for the fields."

"Then the priest of the Temple of the August Peace must be very wise," I said, joking. "How is it he is so poor?"

"They say he is very wise. The old days are as an open book to his wisdom," Yin replied, striding steadily on. In China there is no fear of wisdom and learning. They are the adored, the envied of the humblest coolie. Riches take a very secondary place in comparison. But neither of us had much breath for talk, for the climb took all we possessed, though at thirty I was a decent crags-man in a small way.

It was growing dusk when we reached a great grove of the most extraordinary pines I ever saw. I am no botanist and don't know whether they are peculiar to this place or no. All I can say is that the huge trunks were like pillars of beaten silver, upholding a cloud of foliage, black and awful as night. Picture great cathedral aisles pillared with dull tarnished silver; picture a roof of such height that all detail is lost in the gathering gloom, and you have those strange trees, marshalled in a breathless quiet and waiting. It was dead silent, for the waterfall was now far below, and no words can express the weird solemnity of the place.

Yin led the way, only his footsteps brushing along the forest ways; and suddenly, beyond the mourning trees, at last I saw the temple high above me.

Now you are to picture a very strange and beautiful sight. It rose on three terraces, building above building, each isolated from the other but approached by steps; each surrounding a courtyard through which you passed to the steps leading up to the courtyard above.

In each paved courtyard grew these ancient pines with their ghostly silver pillars, and the courts were so small that the trees entirely overshadowed them—and already it seemed that night was sitting there with veiled face. Once there must have been many monks. Yin told me there were said to have been fifty. Now all was emptiness and desolation and bats and owls made their home in the deserted cells.

We climbed the rock path, expecting to see the priest, and went up the first flight of steps. Old silence reigned in the courtyard—not a sound! We passed over the cracked stone paving and climbed the second steps, and still it might have been a place of the dead, with the dusk gathering about us and groups of ghostly white belladonna lilies growing everywhere. The Chinese are a stolid race to all outward appearance, but I could see that Yin was uneasy. He kept close to me and looked about him constantly.

And now we stood in the third courtyard and in front was a great building with outward-sweeping tiled roofs and the usual horned projections at the four corners to repel evil influences. It looked as if they might be useful here! The doors were wide open and we looked in.

A great cavernous hall was before us, with a smell of dead incense and a faint lamp struggling in vain against the waves of darkness. The light was in a deep brass bowl and threw up a dim light on the colossal face of a golden Buddha above, dreaming the centuries away into eternity, the huge hands clasped on the knees in timeless calm. It was very strange to see this and this only in the dark. It rose out of it like a supernatural

flower floating on a sea of blackness, and soared high into the unseen roof. Only that, and nothing else.

It was the hall of worship, empty, deserted. We stood in dead silence, then Yin muttered what might have been a prayer and went timidly backward into the open air outside. I lost him in the dusk when he was ten paces away, and still I stood, uncertain of my next step, alone in the great cavern.

What was this? Soft footsteps were coming up beside me, a sound such as bare feet make. A figure detached itself from the shadows and the priest of the temple stood by me. I turned with a tingling shock to meet him. He passed me by and led the way to the door, so I saw him first in the gathering dusk.

I must describe this man, for my meeting with him changed the whole course of my life. There are two types of Buddhist priest in China, the high distinguished faces of the old aristocratic race of scholars, and the stupid placidity of the men of the people. This was neither. What did he recall to my mind? I think it was the memory of the stern Spanish friars who burnt and bled Mexico into Christianity of a sort in the old days of the Spanish greatness. He had a cold, remote kind of look about him—a man who could keep a secret—a man of few words, accustomed so long to the solitude that he had become as much a part of it as the wild creatures that dwell in the heart of the woods. Indeed, I knew from Yin that he lived there quite alone, cultivating a little garden for all his needs, except that once a month a coolie came up with such things as decline to grow in gardens. There was something almost awful to me in

the thought of any man living in this deserted place, alone with the snows in winter, cut off from all his kind. But he looked resolute and self-possessed. His robe, poor as the stuff was, was clean and cared-for. He greeted me with the masking Chinese smile.

Of Yin he took not the smallest notice. Fate certainly approaches us in many and strange disguises. I saw in him my host of an idle month, and then good-bye for ever. Fate saw otherwise. He stood looking at me with a cold, fixed stare.

I clasped my hands and bowed to him, standing at attention according to the strict rules of Chinese etiquette which I always followed in such cases. It recalled him to himself and he bowed with the utmost decorum, clasping his hands, moving them up and down and raising them as high as his forehead. The moment he spoke I recognized a man of education.

"What is your distinguished age?" was his first question, and I replied as in duty bound that my undistinguished years reached the number of thirty—when he politely rejoined that he should have supposed me at least twenty years older.

So far all was formula, but it was then the strange thing happened. He leaned forward and stared fixedly at a gold locket which hung on my watch chain. Its peculiarity was that it bore our family arms—a cross with four smaller crosses, one in each space made by the large one. He drew back and looked at me with a keen question in his eyes. They flickered as he stared, and then narrowed over their secret; his face like a mask. I replied to the look.

"Do you know it?" I asked, touching the locket. Without a word he turned from the worship hall and led the way to the smaller buildings that flanked it. Yin followed, bowing incessantly.

The priest never noticed him.

"They told me a guest was coming, a gentleman of the West. His name they did not tell. Is your name Mallerdean?"

I never can express how extraordinary the name sounded, mispronounced by a Chinese tongue and yet unmistakable. Mystery was walking like a ghost in the shadows of the courtyard.

"That is certainly my name. How do you know it? They must have told you."

"That told me," he said, and pointed to my locket.

"Impossible," I said, staring at him. He turned away without a word. Yin followed and, bowing humbly, asked to be shown the rooms we were to occupy. The priest pointed to the left, and disappeared at once in the gathering dark, going toward the hall of worship. Afterward I found he lived in a room which opened into it.

A cool reception, but it is very difficult to put a Chinese boy at a disadvantage where his master's comfort is concerned. Yin followed his nose rather than the direction and took possession of three cells on the right of the courtyard, and in five minutes I saw a cheerful little light burning, and went in.

The baggage had arrived before us with the bedding and stores of necessary food together with a little camp cooking stove which Yin prized beyond anything earthly. He set up a camp chair and table in the one room, and

my roll bed on the floor beside it; brushed away the cobwebs from the beautiful stone latticed window and set it open to the pine-scented night air, flung a rug over the bed and its pillow, and there in ten minutes was a sitting room furnished complete. I dug out my books and writing materials myself, and sat down to consider the situation while a savoury smell arose from the next room and promised supper. Yin had taken no chances on the temple food for himself and me.

I took off my locket and looked at it. The Mallerdean arms—no more—but the inside was interesting. It carried an oval miniature of the smallest size, of a man with powdered hair and a queue tied with black ribbon—the costume dating it at about 1790 as near as I could guess. The face was strong, handsome and haughty with drawn black brows and a stern expression; behind it, faintly indicated in the right-hand corner, a ship. From this I had always thought it must represent some naval officer in civilian dress. I had once taken it out of the locket and found cut on the ivory back the one word "Vigila!" —"Watch!" and the man certainly looked on the watch, ware and wakeful. Of its history I knew nothing. I had found the whole thing in the secret drawer of my father's desk when he died. And naturally I annexed it. It was a striking thing in its way.

Doubly so now. That in the hilly wilds of China I should find a man who recognized the locket was very strange. Would he have recognized the face also? Certainly there had been Mallerdeans in China, but except for my romantic great-great-uncle they had stuck to the treaty ports and feathered their nests very comfort-

ably there. No rambling over China for them! The counting-house and the pen were their weapons.

I resolved I would tackle the priest next day and get to the bottom of the thing, and so betook myself to my writing.

Yin had gone off to sleep in his cell. I knew that because of the dead quiet that had fallen—only the tinkle of the stream running from a mossy fern-fringed spring in the rocks above the upper corner of the court.

Suddenly I looked up. The priest's face was framed in the carved window, looking steadily in upon me—and even as I started up it was gone. I flung the door open and tried to search the night. No one there, but the dim light still burned in the hall of worship and sent a faint beam into the thick dark. Probably he was on his way to pray—that would be all. It was late, past eleven, and I had no curtain to draw across the window, so I undressed and lay down on the bed with an unpleasant sense that those eyes might still be watching with their searching curiosity. I went to sleep.

Suddenly—whether soon or late, I never knew—I awoke. A great storm was raging. I could hear the wind beating wildly on my door as if clamouring for admission—a shrieking, howling night. It rushed in with such frenzy at the carved openings of the window that I felt what I thought was rain wet on my face. At first I had a wild notion that people were speaking in the courtyard, that I heard a cry for help. I leaped up and stood rigid, listening. Yes, some one was speaking, and I heard footsteps and a sound of jarring bars as they were dragged back in their sockets. What on

earth—? And then I remembered that travellers are permitted in some temples to use the worship hall itself as a resting place for the night if they come in numbers. That must be it. But how deadly cold the night had turned! Why, there was snow—actually snow on the ground. I could see it where the faint beam fell across its startling whiteness. Sleep was finished for me. I huddled into my clothes and the long wadded Chinese coat atop, which I used as a dressing gown. I would have a look for myself. The priest had had a secret to hide—I was certain of it. I would take the motto of my locket—"Vigila!"—and be on the watch. No use to rouse Yin. He had had a long day of it.

I opened the door of the cell and stepped out. Yes—snow; it crunched under my feet. Snow in July. Pretty well for the August Peace Temple! It must be deathly cold in the worship hall. I walked straight up to the door—not two minutes away—and found it shut. That again was surprising. It was wide open when I went to bed, and here in the wilds no earthly reason to close it.

I turned with a vague idea of calling to the priest, and as I did it my foot slipped and I fell back striking my head sharply against the edge of the stone step.

I suppose for a minute I was unconscious and that the snow and wind in my face brought me round, for when I could take stock of things again I was lying at the foot of the steps. But the shock had been a nasty one, and when I clambered up with difficulty I felt in my neck a shooting twinge and a warm trickle which was not snow. With shaking hands, sick, and giddy, I knotted

my handkerchief over the wound and tried to think what next, and even as I thought I heard the jarring bars of the temple door drawn back.

As the door gave there was an inrush of wind of such violence that it must have blown out the altar light, and it was from darkness like the mouth of the pit that I heard a man's voice demand my business.

English! The tones were very soft and cold, and somehow I got the impression a foreigner was speaking. I would have told my errand but a sudden trembling seized me and I could only stammer out that I wanted to be helped in as I had hurt myself. At the moment I could not for the life of me remember where I had come from or how to get back. "Help me in," was all I could say.

"That I cannot do," said the gentle voice from the darkness. "Whoever comes here does it of his own will. But the door is open. Do as you please."

A roaring gust of wind seemed literally to shake the foundations of the rocks and to sweep wailing into the hall of worship. I staggered forward, feeling the way with outspread hands, and as the door clanged to behind me I fell forward in a dead faint.

Whether hours or minutes passed I never knew for I had fallen into the gulf of the eternities where time is but a name. But, as I floated up to the surface of consciousness once more, a strange sight met my eyes.

I lay in the hall of worship, but it was changed. Two camp lanterns stood on a pile of baggage at one side, and lit the small wooden stair that ran up into the loft above the colossal Buddha's head—the upper end and the roof

lost in the darkness. Whoever they were they had lit a fire on the empty stone floor, but it gave out no warmth though it sent a dazzling light here and there into the black shadows.

I raised myself on my elbow with a sense of expectancy and looked round. It was the strangest moment. The scene was set, the stage was empty, and I knew (though how I cannot say) that the drama would follow. The storm had planned it, the priest was an accomplice, and Fate had plotted with the two to bring me here at the moment—the moment for what?

Suddenly as it seemed (for whence they had entered I could not tell) two men stood by the fire talking, as heedless of my presence as if I were a dream in a world of shadows—talking eagerly in quick, low voices. Their dress was curiously old-fashioned, dating from a period I could not place, but certainly a hundred years ago, and I noticed that on the hand of the elder was a diamond which must have been of great value, so vivid was its icy sparkle in the firelight. He was an elderly man, with handsome features, haggard lines about the eyes, and a weak mouth that betrayed a life spent in dissipation. His companion was as finished a scoundrel in appearance as ever I am likely to see in the years left to me, a hawk's beak of a nose, colourless light hair, and eyes set deep and close together—obliquely Chinese, and therefore very strange in a Western face.

Instinctively as when one sees a snake I half rose into a defensive posture, but the noise my feet made on the stone, though it sent a lost echo clattering up the stair, attracted no attention from them.

"I have told Dorothy my mind, Captain Vernon, and you may count on her obedience," said the elder man. "If she seem to hang back a little that is a modesty which we soldiers know how to appreciate, and it must be humoured. But there is no real ground for uneasiness."

"I am well aware of the value of a father's influence with so dutiful a daughter, Colonel Keith," the other returned with an undisguised sneer.

I recognized the voice at once. It was the one that had bidden me enter, gentle and cold, but with something indescribably treacherous and malignant in its gentleness.

"Yet there are certainly obstacles," he continued. "The lady has set her heart on John Mallerdean. There is no denying the fact."

I rose to my feet as the words reached me. My name? What could it mean? I forgot my wounded head—everything around me; but as I moved a slight rustle from above sent my eyes upward, and I saw a white face like a wan moon looking down from the darkness of the loft upon the men—a face so wild and piteous that the sight of it actually caught my heart. She was frozen into the attitude of listening; no breath seemed to come between her strained lips; she was framed in an atmosphere of terror. As I looked Shelley's vision of the Medusa crossed my fevered brain—"Its horror and its beauty are divine"—and a cold aura of sympathetic fear shot through me. I listened—as breathless as she.

"John Mallerdean!" said the elder man angrily. "Impossible madness! There is that between his family and

mine that should make my daughter shudder to look upon him. His cursed father! His spy of a mother—God forbid! Before we left England I had reason to curse them, and the dog of a son has done me what hurt he could."

A horrible twisting spasm crossed his face, but he rallied and went on:

"Our blood would not mix in the one vessel, and shall I suppose—"

"Oh! suppose nothing, sir, on my authority, I beg you!" the musical voice replied. It paused a moment, then continued:

"Who am I to read the secret of a woman's heart! Call the young lady. Question her. Look, there she goes! What! Hullo! Whoop!"—and, raising his hands to his mouth, he gave the huntsman's cry as he flung his head back and grinned at the gallery above him.

The shock of the sudden change from blandness to coarse insult, the noise volleying through the emptiness of the hall, had the effect of a blow, and I leaped forward to protect the girl since for a moment he made as if he would rush up the stair, and only helpless shame was written on the other man's face. But she was gone—only darkness looked down upon us as from an immemorial haunt; and he was saying with the gentlest composure:

"One cannot be too lenient or considerate with these frail creatures. If her heart has gone wandering after John Mallerdean, blessed be the peacemakers, and can we blame her?"

"But cursed be the children that disobey their

parents," interrupted the old man wildly. "And there is more in it than that, Captain Vernon—my debt to you—the mortgage! It is you she must marry. I have no choice. Though if I had, my esteem for your character would make me fix on you for her husband before any other."

"Spare my blushes, sir—I have long been sensible of your over-generous estimate of my qualities."

Captain Vernon put the compliment aside with a melancholy gentleness.

"Would that your lovely daughter shared it even partially, though that would be beyond my deserts. But no ill-usage can diminish my respectful adoration of that young lady."

His fixed gaze caught my own and directed it upward. Again the wretched girl, drawn by an attraction she could not withstand, was straining over the rail, her white face a dim spot in the blackness. He made no sound this time, but slowly and silently retracted his lips in a devilish grin, his eyes narrowed like a snake's as he looked at her. It was the mask of a dream that leaves you bathed in sweat in the cold dawn, and the frightful variance with his words and manner intensified the meaning of all. She sank with a faint cry, in a huddled heap, still clutching the rails. Another battering roar of storm assaulted the temple at that moment; the wind seemed to scream in at some forgotten door and fire and lights shot out tongues of flame and went out. Darkness! My head throbbed and again I felt that wet trickle upon my neck.

Whether the time was long or short again I could not

tell, but after awhile I heard that hateful voice once more beside me.

"Turn up the lights for the next act," it said. "There is much to be done before dawn, and a man would not willingly have the face he loves hidden in darkness. Nor the face he hates either," he added with equal gentleness.

Fire and lights flashed up as if at a word of command, and I saw, but with the strongest sense of separation between myself and what I saw, the same girl, crouching in a heap of furs, in the flickering glare of the fire. Her little hand, so pitifully weak and helpless, had a ring of flashing jewels upon it, a singular jade pendant hung about her neck—the Imperial five-clawed dragon in purest green. Her riding cloak was of thick silk furred with sable that comes from the Imperial treasuries. Her long lashes showed the faint blue line of terrified eyes upon Captain Vernon.

Behind her stood a young man, strong, handsome and haughty, with drawn black brows and a stern fixed look on the other. I knew him—I knew him!—the face in my locket. God protect me, was I going crazy? What mad dream was this? Captain Vernon stood, stroking his riding boots with his whip and speaking with the same sneering composure.

"Mr. Mallerdean, your humble servant. I had learned that you were in retreat in the Temple of the August Peace. In a foreign country one can scarcely see too much of a friend. Unfortunately you have roused yourself too late to see Colonel Keith. He has gone forward to Peking with some of the men. His business admitted of no delay."

Mallerdean drew himself up stiffly.

"I regret to say I have had occasion to distrust your word before, Captain Vernon, and I refuse to accept it now. Colonel Keith came here to meet me with the Emperor's safe-conduct that we might transact the secret business you know of with the British warship in the Gulf of Pechili. It is impossible to suppose that Colonel Keith would have gone forward without meeting me. Especially as we had private business also to consider. Where is he? We are not friends, but a gentleman—"

"A gentleman does not repeat his assertion, Mr. Mallerdean. I have told you; and when I add that Miss Keith is left to my care and that we follow her father, you will perhaps see it is as well you should retire."

No one replied. No one moved, except that the girl's lips twitched as if in pain. He continued:

"A devilish night indeed. What a night for a sinful soul to go out into the tempest! An odd fantasy. I have many such."

Looking all the while at their tormentor, the young man laid his hand gently upon the girl's shoulder as if to reassure her, but neither spoke. She hid her face shuddering in her hands. The tap of the whip on the boot grew a little quicker.

"This is a silent greeting. No inquiry as to my business, yet my business is of some moment. I have seen a girl of two years old in Peking—a girl with dark hair and blue eyes, not altogether unlike the gentleman I see before me, and I have heard some rumour of a private marriage some three years back before the Jesuit fathers

—a secret known only to the bride and her father. But these are ancient scandals."

John Mallerdean would have spoken, but she caught at him with a stifled cry. Captain Vernon continued:

"Still no inquiries? Yet we must not misdoubt the heart because the words are few, and I know my good fortune in my bride-to-be. Well, madam, it seems we are alone in this vast place, we three. Let us come to close quarters. Let us be frank."

He was playing with them catlike, but suddenly and horribly the mask of courtesy fell away from his face. He flung the whip from him and laid his hand on his riding sword. John Mallerdean was apparently unarmed, but he stepped forward quietly.

"I am here, sir, to protect my wife. Oblige me by saying what you would be at. Your life is not safe for an hour in these wild parts without the safe-conduct. I have but to call the men—the Chinese have rough ways of dealing with an enemy. Keep back, Dorothy (he put his arm before her like a fence), I will not have you speak with this person."

"You will have, sir, exactly what I please—neither more nor less. But, to resume. We have known each other some years. Can you suppose I should overlook the matter of the safe-conduct? No. When Colonel Keith went, he left the safe-conduct behind."

A dreadful pause. The girl looked at him with staring eyes of horror. "My father was here—here—an hour ago!" she cried. "He is not gone. He said nothing to me. He would not leave me here. What have you done with him? If you are not a murderer, speak!"

"Hold her back, she is a fool!" Captain Vernon said, with those terrible eyes upon the man. "Is a man a murderer because he rids the world of a coward and a cheat? Keith promised me his daughter and all his ill-gotten gains, and he lied to me like a rogue and a scoundrel. He knew she was married, and he patched up his quarrel with you because he knew you were high in Ho's favour and wanted his share of the treasure. He was plotting here and now to get his goods and a part of the treasure sent off to the *Arrogant* and escape from me with his riches. He thought to gull me once more. Yes, my friend, and you were to meet them here to hide the treasure and secure your wife. I knew. What do I not know? But I know this also: You cannot do it. Hand over the treasure! I am beforehand with the three of you. I have settled my account with Keith. I have got the Imperial safe-conduct. My way is clear to the sea. Now, what of you?"

John Mallerdean put his arm about his wife. He saw what was coming.

"Don't be afraid, my dear. We are together," he said. Then gravely: "I guess what you have done. No need to be more particular before a woman. Spare her what you can."

"Spare her? Did she spare me? No! Did you chance to observe, as you came up to the temple, a precipice above the river? It will be a wet lying place at the bottom. I could find it in my heart to pity the man or woman who lies rotting there until the Day of Judgment."

"So that is it," said Mallerdean with stern brevity. "I

own you have won. I did not foresee this, though I should have known you. What is your determination? Yet there is an account no man can escape, and such as our case is, I prefer it to yours."

Vernon laughed in his face.

"Each man to his taste. The riches are mine, the woman is mine. The men are in my pay. I propose you should join your father-in-law in his present lodging. For myself and the lady a honeymoon at the Temple of the August Peace, and then, according to her behaviour I shall determine further. I have never shown myself inflexible to the sex when I find them obliging. And now, having paid off one old score, and cleared the way for the next, we may leave words and proceed to deeds."

He drew some letters from his flap pocket, and as if at a signal, I saw two heads rise noiselessly from behind the heap of baggage—Chinese faces horrible with an expression of dull malice that would make them fit tools in the hand of the more accomplished villain.

The scene was set indeed. The strangest sense of reality and unreality swayed me to and fro. I must warn them—what power kept me silent? I cannot tell, and words fail before the strangeness of such an experience. But it seemed that a film of years was between us. I could almost have touched her dress with an outstretched hand, yet she was so remote that the storm might have been blowing through leagues between us. It was as though I were held immovable in the vise of a dream, with the wolves stealing ever nearer.

Suddenly she rose from the chair and advanced, her hands pleading for her.

"I protest," she began in a choked voice; but he waved her gently behind him.

"Protest nothing, madam—I have asked you no questions. I make no accusation. Your turn will come later. Have the goodness to resume your seat, while I ask Mr. Mallerdean if he has ever seen this letter—or this?"

He had attracted his attention and mine by holding out two letters singularly sealed. I swear I heard no sound but the yell of the wind, but I saw him raise his right hand with an awful quick glare at the man behind Mallerdean.

Now, how Mallerdean guessed or knew I could not tell, but a strange and pitiful thing followed: He also raised his hand, as if in entreaty, and the other drew back.

"I hope I know how to die like a man, Captain Vernon, and I am in your power. You hold the winning cards, but I make a last request and I will buy your consent with the great emeralds the Emperor gave me, as is known to you. I will tell you their hiding place."

There was greed in the pale, glittering eyes. He made a signal of delay to the brutes behind. Mallerdean resumed, standing stiff and straight:

"I wish to embrace my wife before I die, and to say a last word in her ear."

"Agreed—agreed! How came I to overlook them! Where are the jewels? I am not the man to refuse the last request even of an enemy. But no delay. Time passes; the dawn is at hand."

"I will tell you where they are when my farewell is said."

Mallerdean advanced, strong and tall, as the other made way for him and held back the Chinese with a gesture. He stooped over his wife, and laid his cheek very tenderly to hers. I saw him whisper in her ear and she smiled faintly and put her arm about his neck. And then—oh, most pitiful!—I saw a thing so fearful that I can scarcely write it—the flash of a dagger in his hand, and he had plunged it into her heart! She slipped heavily from his arms to the floor.

"We do not leave our women to the mercy of half-breed traitors," he said calmly. "We commit them rather to God. I am ready to follow her. Take your pay and your damnation. The emeralds are sown in the collar of my coat. The treasure is in my leather portmanteau."

Livid, with his face working like a beast's, Vernon said no word but made the last signal. And in a second a cloth was flung over Mallerdean's head and drawn in a slip-knot about the neck. There was a choking cry as he fell beating the air with his hands, and one of the Chinese put a heavy knee on his throat and looked up dumbly for further orders from his master.

How that face changed! How the hidden writing of hell flashed out legible in its white glare of joy.

"Good!" he cried. "Bind the hands too—he is a young man, young and lusty. Bravely done! Stronger, stronger—while I look to the lady!"

I saw him raise a knife such as sailors carry in the sea-port towns; and his teeth showed in a line of white from the retracted lips. Again the lights dwindled, and storm and shadows possessed the evil place. Then in a dim flicker of the dying fire, I saw them dragging something

dark and heavy from the open door into the night, while the woman lay not ten feet from me with the smile of which no cruelty could rob her. In one last leap of the flame I saw an awful face with its beastlike grin pressed upon the window-panes for a moment as they passed outside, and as the eyes met mine and for the first time seemed aware of my presence, the wound burst out again upon my forehead and I pitched forward upon the stone floor, not fainting, but absolutely collapsing in the grip of a fear that was inhuman and deadly.

A wet dawn straggled faintly up out of the east; the wind had raved itself into exhaustion and a gentle ceaseless rain like a broken-hearted weeping fell all around me. I struggled to my feet. I lay in the courtyard at the foot of the steps, where I had fallen: my left knee felt stiff and strained, and a cut crossed my temple. There was no snow—the rain was warm and kind. Had I walked in my sleep—had I dreamed? I hobbled up the steps and walked into the hall of worship. There was no baggage; the stillness of centuries, the smell of dead incense brooded there immovably, and the colossal Buddha, half lost in the shadows of the roof, bowed his age-long peace over the little transient flicker of the lamp at his feet.

I looked at the place where I had seen the fire burning. No sign of it—the dust—the sand of the sea of Time—lay undisturbed.

The stiffness went off as I moved and I went slowly about, searching carefully for any trace of the scene branded on my brain. None—none! Could a nightmare be so detailed—so vivid? Or was it a frightful truth?

As I stood, revolving the strange thing deeply, I heard soft footsteps crossing the hall, and the priest came out of the room adjoining where he lived. His head was bowed: he muttered what might have been a prayer as he came, passing a long rosary through his fingers. On seeing me he stopped short and the beads fell at his side. I saw his eyes travel slowly to the cut on my forehead and to my wet clothes, my haggard looks. Without any sign of astonishment he spoke:

"You have seen."

No question: an assertion.

"I have seen," I said. "Was it true?"

"It was true."

"Then if so, where are they now? Where have they gone?"

He laughed—a strange laugh. There is a bird in China that laughs like that in the woods at some ghostly joke that touches his unknown humour.

"If I could tell where they have gone, I should know more than even the Blessed One, the Exalted Lord, vouchsafed to say. They have gone whither their karma led them along the road of implacable justice. Perhaps in other lives they are even now atoning or receiving their reward. You have the appearance of a wise man. Do not ask idle questions."

But I would be neither annoyed nor deflected from my questions.

"If you know this much, you know more, and I will have the truth. What is this scene of horrors that I saw here last night? If it happened a century ago, how is it that I saw and heard it last night? If it is an illusion

you have called up by some wicked magic—and I know some of your people have the gift of bewildering the brain—then tell me the truth; for I warn you that I will never give up until I get the truth, and the more so because a man of my own blood was apparently concerned in it."

He saw I was in earnest. He stood with his eyes fixed on the ground, considering. I waited his time. At last he raised his head.

"It is the hour for prayer and your wound needs attention and rest. Come to me in my room this evening as the sun sinks and I will tell you what I know, and will show you certain things that it will take time to bring from their hidden places."

He moved on to the altar. I bowed and turned away. No use to press him then.

When I had changed my things and dressed the cut, and Yin had made me some tea, I lay down to rest and fell into a deep and undreaming sleep. Indeed I slept for almost the whole day, for when the boy brought me my midday food, I ate it and fell asleep again the moment it was done.

It was almost evening when I awoke, refreshed in mind and body—strengthened, steadied, ready for anything. But for the priest's words I believe I should then have set the whole vision down as the result of the blow on my head. I had read Francis's book, "Delusions Caused by Injuries to the Head," and, conscious that archives of horrible stories might be compounded of these ingredients, I don't hesitate to say that would have been my conclusion, and that I might even have pieced out the

trains of thought that had started my vision. However, as the sun touched the western horizon I went to the priest's room fully prepared to meet him on any point.

He was sitting with a rough table before him and certain papers on it, and rose and bowed ceremoniously, standing until I took my seat in the strange, primeval place. There was a window filled with beautiful stone tracery, all interwoven dragons and monsters of cloud or ocean. The walls were rough stone, the floor the same. It might have been a cave. Indeed, in one corner I saw ferns growing, and a shoot of some wild vine had found footing in a crevice near the ceiling and hung a green drapery down that side of the wall. Small grey lizards crept about, flicking very successfully at the flies. The door into the weird hall of worship stood open.

He began in his refined Chinese of which I omit the many honorifics. "You desire to know the meaning of what you saw last night. It was illusion, and yet truth also."

"Explain," I said briefly.

"It was truth in that it happened in that very place more than a century ago. It was illusion, because you saw it as one sees a reflection in water. But what truth and illusion are and where they separate, who can tell?"

He meditated a moment, then continued:

"In the days when this thing happened, this temple was in imperial disfavour. There were no priests but one, and he an old man who would not desert the service of the Exalted Buddha. On a certain day he received what he believed to be an imperial message. It was written with the Vermilion Pencil. He was to provide shelter for an

English gentleman well known in China because he had saved the life of the late Emperor Ch'ien-lung in a painful disease. And shelter also for another Englishman travelling with his daughter and servants. And their commands were to be obeyed. No reason was given. He obeyed, as we obey in China, without question. But he marvelled because it was winter and the snow heavy on the ground, and in the forests.

"So, a few days later, came the Englishman who had served the Emperor, with his servants and wrapped in sables like a great lord, and what he did the priest could not tell for by day he never saw him. And two days after him in the grey twilight came the other Englishman with his daughter, and following them a man of the mixed blood. The father and daughter he placed in the hall of worship, for they had much precious baggage, and for the woman he made a sleeping place in the loft beside the head of the Holy One, because she would be near her father."

He paused here and opened a yellowed paper of the sort used still by the Court in Peking, commanding the priest of the Temple of the August Peace to do as he had told me. It was dated and looked authentic. He went on:

"But the priest was deeply impressed by the fear of the woman and her father of the half-breed who followed them. He feared mischief; for how could he be responsible to the Emperor if harm should happen to the favoured ones under his august protection? What to do he knew not, but at last that he might watch, he hid himself in the corner of the gallery that runs behind the head of the Exalted One, and there he saw what you have seen.

What could he do—an old man and feeble and in great terror? You know what he beheld. I need not tell it.

"Now, when all was over and the villainous half-breed stood rejoicing in his work, he sent the men who had done his will to drag away and hide the bodies of husband and wife; and, searching with care, he found a box that stood among the baggage heaped in the hall of worship, and he opened it by force and knelt above it, gloating on what was within—it contained such riches as the mind of man may hardly imagine. Great strings of pearls—jade cups, stuffs heavy with gold and such-like toys; and he stood gloating on these, little thinking that any beheld. And leaving the box a moment, he went to the cell hard by where the first Englishman had slept, and returned with his coat and a gold tablet. And when the priest saw the tablet, alone as he was in the upper darkness, he kow-towed humbly for he knew the sacred will of the Emperor written in gold, and understood the greatness of the murdered man.

"So the half-caste villain ripped out the emeralds from the coat and fastened the box, having put a garment of little worth on top to deceive the eye if it were opened. And for awhile he lay and slept. Yes, he slept in that sacred place polluted with blood and with his crimes. So do the evil!"

I listened with breathless attention. What a drama! But nothing hastened the priest. He produced from among the papers and laid before me a small golden tablet with an inscription to the effect that John Mallerdean was to be regarded as having everywhere in the Empire the authority of a Chief Minister, and his concerns were

to be forwarded by all loyal subjects with food, shelter, messengers, men and horses wherever he might go, he being under the imperial protection of Ch'ien-lung.

It can be imagined with what interest I saw this priceless family possession. So it was true—the tradition I had always thought a wild exaggeration, to say the least of it, was here substantiated before my eyes. The priest put his hand over it and went on:

"Then this old man, weak and alone, considered what he could do to carry out the will of the Emperor and avenge his honoured servant. It is not lawful for a servant of the Exalted Lord to shed even the blood of an animal, much less that of a man, and he was a student of the law which promises ages of punishment and torture to any such transgressor. Yet—so it seemed to him—better even this than that the favoured of the Emperor should be unavenged, and this monster pass forth to do further cruelties. I know not if he were right or wrong."

"Right, a thousand times!" I said hotly. "If he felt this, he showed the spirit of a man."

"You cannot judge. You have sat at the feet of another Teacher," he answered, and went on undisturbed.

"So, creeping like a ghost by the sleeping villain he went down through the snow to the room where certain medicines were kept, and there, choosing his ingredients with care, he compounded that poison known as the Draught of Immortality, and having done this, he went to his own cell and lay down as if in a deep sleep.

"And when it was near dawn the villain came, ready for his journey, and he looked in through the window and the priest could feel his eyes on him, and he made as if he

slept heavily. But the man waked him and, showing the safe-conduct he had stolen, demanded food and four more men to carry his baggage, saying the others had gone forward and he must follow. And the priest bowed and requested the honour of offering the ceremonial tea to one so favoured by the august sovereign."

He paused, as if unwilling to continue. I urged him, breathless with interest. But of the death he would not speak directly. It touched some deep horror in his soul. He resumed after a pause.

"Now, when the men returned from concealing the bodies, that wretch lay on the snow as if struck by lightning. No mark upon him—no sign, but a dead face of horror. And the priest standing before the hall of worship, pointed down to the carrion and bade the men flee for their lives from the vengeance of the Exalted One and of the Emperor—whose hand reached to the very extremities of the empire. And they turned without a word and fled."

He stopped as if the story were ended, but I was prepared with questions that must be answered for much might hang on them.

"How was it you knew this?"—touching my locket.

"Because, when the dawn came and the men were gone, the priest went by a way he knew to the foot of the precipice where The Flying Tiger river leaps to the waterfall. Two of the bodies, the old man's and the girl's, were washed away in the water, but the younger man's had fallen short, and he lay there bruised and broken but noble in death; and, giving him such burial as he could upon the bank, the priest brought back this—"

He produced from beneath the papers a gold watch, heavy and large, inclosed in an outer and separate case of gold, with the Mallerdean arms (the cross with the four smaller crosses), and an inscription inside the case to the effect that it had been given to John Mallerdean as a token of gratitude by Abel Kenne, of Calcutta, merchant. It was attached to a broad fob chain, and a locket with the same arms and an agate seal hung to it. The mystery was explained.

"Then," I asked, "what became of the box containing the jewels and other valuables?"

"They are here. The priest sent a messenger to the imperial footstool announcing what had happened and requesting punishment for his inability to protect the august visitors, and the sacrilege of taking life. But no word came. He waited long, but nothing was heard, and who was he to question the celestial will? Therefore, he invited another priest to take his place in the temple because he was no longer worthy, and he went away up into the mountain wilds and there, becoming a solitary, he lived and died in expiation of his crime."

"Another question. There was a child of that marriage. Do you know anything of her?"

"This only. She was placed in the honourable family of Wang, and when she reached her fifteenth year she was wedded to a great minister. It is said there was lately a daughter with black hair and eyes like sapphires in the Li family in Peking. More I know not. And now, since I have answered many questions, may I ask one of my honourable guest? Who are you?"

I felt a reply was his due. I told him as shortly as I

could my name, my position and the family history in so far as it concerned John Mallerdean. He listened with the gravest attention; and when I had finished, he spoke in his turn:

"Since more than a century has gone by and these things are unsought, and from the throne no word ever came, it seems to my insignificant judgment that you have the heir's right to them. You shall see them to-morrow. And now it is time for my evening meditation. May I offer you tea?"

The Chinese signal for the dismissal of a guest, but I delayed a moment for the question which interested me most of all.

"Why did I see this wonderful thing? Has it been seen by any other person, or was it my kindred blood that opened the shut door? I earnestly ask you to speak clearly on this point."

He stood up facing me, a remarkable figure, tall and calm.

"You have a right to what I can tell you. Certainly kindred blood is much and the spirits of the ancestors have strange powers. When you approached this place did no vibrations, no instincts of memory and fear wake in you? But as for the means—what he had seen could never be effaced from the mind of the priest who had seen it. He dreamed of it, brooded over it; it became a part of his life. Also he rightly considered that the knowledge of these things should be preserved. It might be a matter of imperial concern. But he dared not write it. What is written may be seen of any eyes. So he made use of a Buddhist knowledge to preserve and con-

tinue the secret, and so made it known to his successor here under an oath that it should be shown only to each successive priest of the temple. This knowledge is a power of the mind whereby one man may make another see what he wills, as if he himself had witnessed it; and by this means many secrets of Buddhist lore are handed down through the ages. And when I came here the secret passed on to me, and I, too, was compelled to see that horror."

"Wonderful. Most wonderful!" I said. "So that, as if in a picture, a thing that has happened may be preserved for ever?"

"Even so. We have all seen—and there have been five successive priests—what you have seen. And as for you—when I saw the trinket at your chain I determined to throw open the gate, knowing that if you were of the same blood, you must see; not otherwise. You have seen. I show you the treasure. There is no more to say."

And he courteously dismissed me. But how it was done he would not tell nor could I guess. In all I have seen of Western hypnotism and its allied arts or sciences, the practicer and the subject must be together—there is the almost visible influence passing between the two. This had certainly not been the case here as far as I know. But what do I know? In the West we are beginners, stumblers, in these matters. In the Orient they walk with assured steps on a way they have known for ages.

The next day he showed me the ancient box of heavy

leather and its contents. There was a string of pearls of extremest beauty—clear mellow lustre of purest water, moonlight crystallized in the ocean. There were four chains of exquisitely carved jewel jade, such work as is not done now in China even for the mighty. There were two of smooth jade of the right young beech-leaf green. There were chains of cord and gold, gold sheaths for the lengthy fingernails of the noble, encrusted with jewels. There was a great loose sapphire, blue as the ocean in a calm. There was a cup of jade and crystal of amazing workmanship with the Imperial dragon in gold for a handle. I could imagine that as the object of frantic competition among the connoisseurs of the West. There were—but why write an inventory? Only the jewels and objects of art had survived—among them a magnificent landscape of the Tang period, worth untold gold to any museum as I well knew.

But the furs were moth-eaten, the precious gold and silver brocades were tarnished. Only the loveliness of their design and texture was left them—the rest was lost beyond hope of restoration, as I judged.

Lastly, he displayed six glorious cabochon emeralds, deep and green as the stillest deeps of ocean. And then I spoke my mind.

"These things," I said, "are not mine, if any direct descendant of John Mallerdean lives and can claim them. You say there is a girl in Peking descended from that marriage. When I return I shall make it my business to trace every link of the chain. The watch and the locket and seal I will take. I think I may fairly lay

claim to these unless another claims them, and besides they may help my search. Do you agree with my decision?"

With the inflexible sense of justice that is a mark of the Chinese he agreed fully. If he could give any aid he promised it. He put the watch with its appendages at once into my hand, and together we repacked the box and stored it away in its dusty hiding place in the loft above the head of the golden Buddha.

"This," I said, "must be what they called the treasure of Ho. For the present let it rest. And show me no more visions for they are unwholesome for mind and body. I have come here for rest, and this dreadful thing has shaken me to the soul."

He promised gravely and I saw no more visions at that time. I passed my days quietly, studying, fishing in the wild river, climbing, and many times considering the possibility of a search for this girl who shared my blood, now lost like a drop of water in the ocean of the millions of China. I knew enough history to know that the great Emperor Ch'ien-lung had been succeeded on the dragon throne by his very worthless and ineffectual son Chia Ching, and that therefore this horrible episode must have taken place in his reign; but not an inch of my way could I see.

For a month I stayed and went in and out of the hall of worship in perfect serenity. For I knew it was haunted by no unhappy ghosts. They had long passed on their way to peace—the doors of sleep and silence had swung and shut them in, and from them there was nothing to fear. They were beyond even pity. But though

they disturbed me no more I knew, and could not tell how I knew, that there was an urge in my blood I had never known before. It concerned the girl. She was theirs, a sorrowful memory of a great crime; and if theirs, mine also, a responsibility, a duty, something painful in the background of my mind that would give me no peace until I had sifted the matter. I knew that. Though I tried to forget, it was there.

On the bright morning when I left the temple for the world, I stood looking up through the pines at the terraces of the buildings rising above me. The priest was at the first steps. The sunlight fell through the trees on his sad Mongolian features and the deep yellow of the robe he wore. In spite of the sunshine an air of sealed mystery held the place like something hidden in the clench of a strong hand.

For me—I have seen so much of the inner life of the Orient that I accepted the thing exactly as I had seen it and the priest confirmed it, only resolving that I could never possess myself of those riches if the woman still lived who had the better right. That was plain justice. And if I could find her I would not leave her among an alien people but by her own choice. The fate of a woman may be very terrible in China—not by any means what I should choose for a daughter of my own people. As I turned to go, the priest made a sign and I ran up the steps to him again.

"Take this," he said, "I had forgotten it. It is the ornament the girl wore about her neck. An imperial jade dragon. It may help you in your search. And take also the blessing of the Excellent One upon a pur-

pose which is just and rightful. And go in peace. Also, if you need aid that I can give, it is yours."

He laid in my hand a small dragon of the most costly green jade, but with this peculiarity—that a vein of rose jade ran through the stone and had been cleverly utilized by the cutter in the wings of the beast. A freak of nature which might not happen once in a thousand years and an amulet such as any woman might love! A small gold ring inserted at the back made it a pendant. And also on the back were the two characters which signify honour and long life. The last prediction had certainly not come true.

I accepted both gifts with gratitude and sprang down the pathway again to overtake Yin who was stolidly leading on. The pines closed their impenetrable gloom behind me like the shutting of a gate.

The past was past. I went on in ignorance to meet the strange future.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I came down into Peking from the Temple of August Peace the plunge into daily life and work was startling. I had been living with visions and the atmosphere pursued me. By a marvel of Buddhist lore the past had been reproduced for me as in a speaking picture and the thing made me restless. I had always taken an interest in the occult writings of the Taoists and other mystery teachers, and now I set to work in earnest that I might understand, if possible, the singular thing that had befallen me. I sought the company of such Chinese scholars as work in these underground passages of truth, and many and strange were the things I encountered, but none that specially fitted my own experience. It did not occur to me then that they were withholding knowledge for which they did not judge me fitted. It is very difficult in the Orient to find the key for the lock that guards the Mysteries. I was so hard-worked that heaven knows I ought to have had no time for all this, but I made it, and in all I did there walked ghostly beside me the vision of "a girl with black hair and eyes like sapphires," as the priest had described her—eyes beautiful, memory-haunted and very strange among her own people. Was there something in her nature, also, exotic as those blue eyes which made her an alien in spirit? If so, how

pitiable might be her fate, how tragic her doom! She haunted me, for in her veins ran drops of my own blood and we Mallerdeans have always been staunch clansmen. Woe be to the man who lays a little finger on one of the clan. There were never many of us and we hold together, and as a matter of fact that girl and I were the only two left of the Devon Mallerdeans, and for any others I care nothing. Sentiment perhaps, but family sentiment goes a long way. And there was more to it than that. There were the pearls, the grass-green emeralds, the jade and other splendors hidden away in the dusty loft behind the colossal head of the Buddha, and I wanted these things for myself as the next heir of the Mallerdeans, the John Mallerdean who now represented the man so wickedly done to death. I think that desire was not unreasonable. But she came first and therefore the question of her life or death was one of immense moment to me.

I made careful notes of all I had gathered from the priest. First, came the daughter of John Mallerdean. His wife had been a Keith of Keith, and there is no better blood in the world. In musty mercantile records at Canton I discovered that a Colonel Keith had been known there in the eighteenth century trading in furs and ivories. From Scotch friends I ascertained that a Colonel Keith of Cumbrae had sailed from Leith for China six years before—his wife a daughter of the Lauderdales. John Mallerdean's daughter was well born at all events! After her parents' murder she had been "placed in the honourable family of Wang." And "in her fifteenth year she was wedded to a great minister." That was all, my

sole information. I had, of course, the jade dragon and my knowledge of events at the temple, but common sense told me that all this was a hopeless sort of business to start on. Her marriage would probably be the most outstanding event of her life. I turned my speculations in that direction first.

Allowing the murders to have taken place at the end of 1799, that would bring us to about 1815 for her marriage as near as I could guess. The girl I now was looking for might easily be her great-great-granddaughter, for China marries early, a Chinese girl lost in the tremendous space of the Chinese empire among the million Li who figure in that clan. It was a pretty hopeless lookout. I sent a message to the priest to ask if he could give me any clew to the Li family in Peking, and had for answer that he had heard they occupied a house at one time near the Hsi Yuan, the Western Park. I went at once to that quarter and could not hear that any such people had been known there. Of course to a Chinese conversant with the history of his Court the marriage of a great minister with a foreign bride might be possible to trace, but on the other hand, it was quite possible that the story of her birth might not be generally known. If she had powerful protectors they would very likely conceal it, especially in the lifetime of the Emperor Chia Ching, who had no reason to love John Mallerdean. Then, she must have had a Chinese upbringing for she was but two years old when she passed into the hands of the Wang people and to them I had no clue whatever, and Wangs are as common in China as Smiths among the English-speaking peoples.

Why, the girl may never have known her own story—very likely did not; and if the marriage excited no comment it must have long ago slipped into the dust of ages except for some dim record in a family history I could never know.

And yet I was firmly resolved that the matter should not drop. I was up against it somehow, even apart from the money involved. And I had quite unusual chances in my almost unique acquaintance with Chinese ways and means, for there was not another man in Peking at the time who had so many native acquaintances and could come and go as I could. That helps all the time in a country that is really a sealed book yet.

But Peking loomed before me vast, mysterious, sinister, shut against a foreigner who wishes to probe into any sort of mystery. Unless indeed he had money to spend lavishly and astutely, and that was very far from my case.

Eighteen months went by and I knew no more than the day I left the temple, and still the thing haunted me. The impression strengthened instead of fading. I would sit and stare at the small jade dragon which the dead woman had worn about her neck, beautiful and precious with the vein of rose jade that cut into the purest green, and wish for some Buddhist enchantment to make it speak and declare its hidden history. I would take out John Mallerdean's watch from its outer and separate case of gold, with the Mallerdean arms richly embossed upon it, the cross with the four smaller crosses in its spaces. These things possessed me. They set my mind

working like a mole in every underground direction that could lead anywhere. But always sooner or later I was up against the impossible. What could I do?

It was one day as I sat with the watch and locket before me that it struck me as strange that the locket should be empty. A man who so loved his wife and could so seldom see her would surely carry her picture about with him. I touched the spring as I had touched it a hundred times before and looked at the empty ovals within. It was of English workmanship—some trinket he had brought out when he came to China, old and worn, the engraving faint on it, but nothing—no clue. I was just going to put the things away in my dispatch box, when Mutrie, a man I knew well, came charging into the room to ask me to go out with him to the race-course, and with the instinct of hiding them—I don't know why, but I never could bear anyone to see them—I tried to snatch up the watch and dropped the whole show on the bare floor, and clumsily set my foot on the locket.

"By George, you've done it properly this time!" said Mutrie. "If that's your best girl she won't forgive you in a hurry!"

He pointed. The gold was bent and dented, the little glass ovals were smashed, but the breakage had revealed two inner ovals hidden beneath the outer ones, unglazed because they were thus protected. And in one was the miniature of a girl and in the other of a child.

Then it rushed on me. Of course John Mallerdean would hide them. The marriage was secret, the birth of the child was secret. But in this way he could feast

his eyes on the dear faces, and who in the world could suspect that the empty locket carried his life!

But that was no time for thought. I "drew in my heart," as the Chinese say, and made nothing of it to Mutrie. I had it safely in the dispatch box, and we were talking of horses five minutes after, and we went off to the race-course, and I put the thing resolutely away from me until I got back to my diggings in the street near the French Legation, and locked my door and got the treasures out once more. I pulled the electric light close and began to study the faces.

The girl's I knew at once. It was stamped on my mind by the frightful scenes I had witnessed at the temple. Not strictly beautiful, but lovely, pale and sweet and infinitely tender, the large soft eyes looked out with a transparent candour that must have wrung the heart of the man who loved her in secret. The brown hair was piled high on her head in the fashion of the time, and a little Puritan muslin crossover hid the spring of the delicate throat from the bosom, and the only ornament she wore was a gold chain sustaining the jade dragon that lay before me on the table. The utmost pains had been taken with that costly mark of the Emperor's favour, whereby I judged the artist to be Chinese. Somehow, looking at the face lying before me —so gentle, so womanly—and knowing the frightful doom that had caught and crushed her, the piteousness of the story moved me more than I like to say. I turned to the child.

A handsome child—not a bit like the mother, dark and vivid. I should say with any amount of inborn char-

acter and energy. I opened the locket I myself always wore and laid it beside the others—the man with powdered hair, handsome and haughty with his straight black brows and queue tied with black ribbon, and the ship faintly indicated behind him.

John Mallerdean and his daughter! I would swear to it in any court of law. No mistaking the child's straight black brows, and firm, beautifully cut mouth and rebellious hair. The only thing she had of her mother was the blue eyes under those noticeable brows, and on these the artist had insisted because of their unusualness. He had made them bluer, I think, than they could have been in life, a deep gentian blue. But they had her father's expression, strong and proud. I would wager that the great Minister of State who married that young lady found no docile Chinese wife behind the veil when for the first time he raised it. What had her fate been, with those eyes and that English blood burning in her, and all the cruel precedents of China pressing upon her young head! I did not like to think. I put the things away, more profoundly resolved than ever to track down this strange family history to its end, bitter or sweet.

But the big outer world was now to take a hand in my affairs.

It was the spring of 1900 and the Boxer trouble broke like a deluge on Peking. Of course it was not unexpected by the Chinese. I who had been born and brought up in China knew well that 1900 was believed by them to be a year marked out for misfortune. It opened with evil astronomical omens, a state of affairs likely to bring its own fulfilment. And Shantung was

seething with the "Plum Blossom Fists," as the Boxers were originally called. There was certainly big trouble brewing, but all the foreigners continued hopeful and unbelieving. The Old Buddha, as the Chinese called the Dowager Empress, had never shown herself so amiable. She had received the ladies of the diplomatic corps, a thing unheard of, and had dismissed them charmed with her beautiful gifts, her candid gentleness, and what they were pleased to call the girlish abandon of her delightful manner. And it was she who held the key of the crisis, for the weak Emperor, whom she had put on the throne, was a trembling puppet in her hands. Who could fear anything? Nevertheless, hordes of Boxers poured into Peking. Providentially there were men in the legations who knew the August Aunt (as she was also called) better, though, when it was announced that a guard of foreign troops was due from Tientsin to strengthen the legations, many wise heads were sorely distressed, fearing the Empress would be pained by the want of confidence thus displayed. Pained! Good God!

But I must not dwell on the outside history of the time. It is only as it bears on my own extraordinary quest that I must touch it. So I will simply say that when the storm broke every European man, woman and child was ordered into the legations for the bare chance of life, and the very people who had scorned the precautions were the first to hurry in.

Peking was in the hands of the Empress and the Boxers. It is then the Orient becomes terrible. One cannot tell how the Oriental mind is working, and frightful

dreams of unspeakable sins and cruelties possess the soul. The chief called on us all in the service to collect and safeguard the records, shut down the business and go in with the rest. Perfectly right and reasonable, but my mind was made up before the crash came. I knew exactly what was due, better than many of the big bugs, and no credit to me. A man has a pull who is born and raised in China and speaks Manchu as well as Hakka, that queer halfway-house tongue between the far-apart languages of the North and South, the southern Cantonese and the Mandarin of Peking and the North. Mandarin, of course, I spoke fluently, for that was in my daily work. But that was not all, by any means. When you remember that my people had been doing their bit in China for more than a century and a half it is nothing to write home about if we Mallerdeans know a little more of the Chinese mind than the Johnny Raw who comes out via Singapore and Shanghai with his mouth and eyes at full stretch and himself like wax in the hands of the first cunning Chinese comprador who takes the trouble to gull him. You're not afraid of a fellow, you understand, and I knew by instinct when the Chinese were spoofing or when it was time to stand from under. I had now revolved all this and said at once that I would stay outside and do what I could in the interests of our department and otherwise while the siege lasted.

Well, of course they talked when it came to that. My chief sent for me and said it was entirely unusual and that I was a hot-headed fool who should know better at thirty. And when his breath and patience both petered out I said

a siege of the legations was also unusual and that I had reasons. I was asked to state them.

Then I weighed in. I pointed out that it might be very handy for the besieged to have a friend outside with rather special means of conveying news. That, as he himself knew, I had once passed quite successfully for a Manchu from Sungaria under rather queer circumstances. That I had seen quite a bit of life in Chinese dress, and had spent two summers in Mongolia before I was broken in at the Customs. Lots of fellows in the Indian Civil Service know twice as many tongues as I, still it was helpful.

I also mentioned that I thought the Manchu dynasty was going to have troubles apart from those it was asking for. A race of conquerors from the North, they have always despised the Chinese as their subjects, and I felt pretty sure—but that comes later.

He replied that the Japanese had the best information and the best means of getting it of any of the Powers, and that they, more than any others, insisted on the frightful dangers. He also wanted to know (ironically) whether I had ever heard of "the lingering death" and cared to run the risk of that specially Chinese invention. I told him I had not only heard of it but had seen it, and had no intention of being the star of such a show. That any sensible person who is around when China is on the move, invariably has a little cyanide of potassium handy in case of difficulties, and that I really believed that might prove as easy a way out as many of them would be likely to have behind the legation walls. In a word, I

would take the responsibility. He agreed finally, for he saw the point of an outside friend who knew the ropes, and next day they all went in, and I stayed out, and a very queer time began.

Of course my initial plans were made beforehand. I went back to my diggings, put on my Chinese dress—no queue necessary at that time—slung the jade dragon about my neck where it would not meet the eye, put John Mallerdean's watch and appendages in a bag about my waist, with what ready money I had been able to get from the bank, now shut down, and went off to Yang Lien's big house in the western quarter. I remember that I met Mutrie on his way to the legation with another man I knew, and they were babbling about all this being a flash in the pan. It would be over in a few days, and the Empress would learn her lesson and the new era of civilization and commerce come in with a rush.

Would it? I thought I knew better. Anyhow they little guessed that the tall Chinese who bowed politely as he passed them on Hata-men Street was John Mallerdean and a colleague. I never saw Mutrie again. He was shot a week later.

But who was Yang Lien?

A great man, a statesman, a friend of the Empress, loyal and true, until he dared to point out that her mad belief in the Boxers as the weapon for ridding China of the foreigner, would lead her into troubles that would end sooner or later in the ruin of the dynasty. A man of high blood and courage and integrity to match, and a friend of my dead father and of myself.

I had known him since I was a youngster, when my father, taking me by the hand, marched me off to his great house and presented me in these words:

"Excellency, here is a boy to carry on the tradition of the Mallerdeans and with it the respect and affection due to your house which has ever befriended and protected mine since there was a Mallerdean in China."

And he, receiving me very kindly, put his hand on my small head and replied:

"My friend, in memory of that great deed done by your ancestor in rescuing mine from the floods of the Yangtze-Kiang and of the friendship between your family and mine from that day, I accept this boy as heir to it and my hand shall not fail him at need. He shall be as my son."

I looked up into the fine middle-aged face clear and serene as if cut in old ivory, the very epitome of all that is aristocratic in birth and nature, and liked what I saw. After that his doors were always open to me, and that led to other matters which played their part in my great adventure. Now I went straight off to ask his advice and follow it. I need hardly say I had my own quest full in view. In this mighty upheaval many hidden things might come to the surface. There is nothing like fishing in troubled waters.

Impossible to describe my astonishment when I found the big courtyard full of Boxers and Kansuh soldiery. The orderly precincts looked like a camp of gipsies and ruffians, and a moment's anxiety seized me lest my good friend had gone mad with the rest and joined the Empress's party. But it would take a lot to make me be-

lieve his calm good sense had run amuck like that. I drew my coat closer about me to avoid the filthy ruffians, as any Chinese gentleman might do, and walked on through the narrow lane they had left to the house.

No one from the very ordinary street outside and the blind front presented to it could have guessed the really beautiful sight within. Yang Lien's family had been wealthy for the last two centuries and he himself was the third Minister of State it had produced. The court was nobly planted with trees—the trees that modify the stern secrecy of Peking as you look down from the surrounding walls of the city, and the main building lay well back, approached by handsome stone steps. Inside, a delicious coolness modified the summer heat, for the rooms were very large and lofty, built with a view to light and air, and, though not crowded, magnificently furnished with rarest specimens of the craftsman's art in carved woods and priceless lacquer. The hangings in the first reception room were of rich silk of imperial yellow (by special favour of the Emperor) nobly embroidered with flying phœnixes and dragons, and ancient bronzes were relieved against them with gigantic porcelain urns and basins in which flowers and dwarfed trees were growing delightfully. Being summer, the magnificent carpets I knew well had been taken up and replaced with floor coverings of woven bamboo peelings delicately painted—cool and clean. Nothing more austerely beautiful could be imagined than this great room where many of the greatest Chinese statesmen had often met for two hundred years to discuss her affairs. It looked into a private garden whereof more later. Needless to say I had never seen

the women's wing of the house, though I knew from Yang Lien, and from his son Yang Lu that besides the first and secondary wives, there were four fair daughters of the house.

I sent in my Chinese card by the servants at the door. I should, of course, have properly sent a sheet of red paper before me with the words "Your servant desires to bow his head before you and to offer you his respects," but there had been no time for this and I judged that the omission might be pardoned at such a time. The answer came quickly: "It will give me pleasure and I beg the guest to enter."

Immediately the two centre leaves of the door were flung open in my honour, and I entered the hall, finding the master, Yang Lien, ready to receive me at the foot of the short staircase leading to the room I have described.

He was an old man now, but a beautiful one, more dignified, stately and calm than ever.

The wildest imagination could not picture any man venturing on a liberty with this great Chinese gentleman. He gave and expected studied courtesy, and to me, whom he had known from a boy, his greeting was as ceremonious as to a distinguished stranger, and though I knew he had a sincere affection for me, it never infringed upon that fine dignity. I liked it—I liked it still better than the coarse rough and ready familiarity of the West. I will, however, spare the honorifics in our talk, but he motioned to me to precede him, though I protested, and he then followed me into the room. Many bows were exchanged; with the rich silk of his robe he dusted the

spotless seat of the chair I was to occupy. I did the same for his. I bowed to my chair before I sat in it, and we both finally took our places.

Naturally I waited for him to speak. His face was sad and careworn, there were deep lines about the eyes. I had not seen him for a couple of months and the change was marked.

"My son," he said at length, "you are come in a sad time, yet a good one, for I have wished to see you. My heart is heavy for friends in danger, and it has dwelt most of all on you. There is a dark hour at hand. Nay, it is here already."

He looked in the direction of the courtyard.

"My honoured protector and father," said I, "I am come to seek your wisdom. My friends have all departed to the legations, but I do not follow them. I remain outside."

"You have doubtless a good reason? You do not disguise from yourself that the danger is very great?"

"I do not disguise it, but I have good reasons."

His innate courtesy forbade inquiries. He looked thoughtfully at me for a moment, and then said with perfect serenity:

"My son, you should know my position, that you may judge whether you can speak with freedom. To you I know I may speak safely. You have known me high in favour at the Palace. The Motherly Countenance (the Empress) has ever been turned on me with benevolence. Now, it is so no longer. Her Majesty is possessed with the belief that in the Boxers lies the hope of deliverance for our country, and since I have ventured to

lay the truth before her, a cloud has passed before the sun and I live in darkness."

He paused and I dared not speak. I knew he had a sincere affection for the Empress. Strange and terrible woman! I have never known one who had known her well who could resist her charm. None could explain it. None could resist it. There had not been a moment, there was not now, in which Yang Lien would not have laid down his life, not only to save hers, but to rescue her from any mistake political or private.

"These men you see in the courtyard," he resumed, "are there by no will of mine. The very sight of them is to me as the precipice to the tiger at bay. But it is the will of her Majesty that they should be fed and sheltered and I obey, though I see in them the curse of my country. Look at them (he pointed to the circular side window)! It is this rabble that is believed to have magic powers, to be under the direct protection of the divinities, and this when you may go out and see their dead bodies lying in the street where the foreign troops entering to guard the legations shot them! It is as if a madness had descended upon our greatest. The Emperor, her nephew, is a helpless puppet in her hands."

"But surely, most honoured," I ventured to say, "the Empress herself cannot believe in their magic?"

"Cannot she!" He laughed bitterly. "She repeats the Boxer charm seventy times daily: 'I am the Spirit of the cold cloud, behind me lies the Deity of fire. Invoke the black gods of pestilence.' And every time she repeats it her chief attendant shouts: 'There goes one more foreign devil!' What is to be done in such a case?

I saw her Majesty last night and even her divine wisdom was so beclouded as to say: 'The foreigners are like fish in the stewpan. For years have I lain on brushwood and eaten bitterness because of them, nursing my revenge. Have I not hidden my hatred? Did I not invite their women to my Palace? But now, if the country will hold together, their defeat is certain.' I tried in my humility to lay the truth before her august feet, but she would not hear me and I came sorrowful away. Therefore—"

But, interrupting him, there came with awful suddenness the great boom of guns. The bombardment of the legations had begun. He turned away and hid his face with his sleeve, for a moment, and I dared not intrude upon his thoughts. A great tumult followed amongst the rabble in the courtyard, wild cries of rejoicing, the shrieks and yells of devils let loose. I listened with terrible forebodings, not for myself, but for my friends within those ill-protected walls, and for Peking itself—and worse.

Presently he turned to me, composed as ever.

"My son, you now know the facts. Her august Majesty will proceed in her course until she learns by the bitter experience which alone dares be truthful with great rulers. Now, knowing I am in the shadow of her disfavour, is it still your wish to tell me your reasons for remaining in this bloody tumult? Do you still care to trust to the protection of a fallen man? If so, speak in the sure knowledge that what counsel and help I can give are yours."

Now this was an extraordinary generosity. He had put his life in my hand by his criticism of the Empress. Well, he knew his man; and I knew mine, and then and

there spoke out. Of course I had sounded him long ago as to the marriage of the Mallerdean girl with a high Minister of State, but as he appeared to know nothing I had let the matter drop and it was long forgotten. Now, however, it was better to be perfectly open and take the view of one who knew the China of both worlds—the aristocratic and the peasant.

I begged one half hour of his precious time, and when he agreed, with the unwearying courtesy of the true Chinese gentleman, I told him the strange story of my vision at the Temple of the August Peace and the intention that sprang from it. Part of the story was not new to him. Like all high officials of old descent he knew a great deal more than I did myself of the secret services of the former John Mallerdean to the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, the greatest of the Manchus. I had often picked up most interesting bits of information from him on this head, enough to give me hope of chronicling some day my forebear's amazing adventures. Colonel Keith's name he knew also. But when I came to my vision in the Temple, he, listening with grave attention, unconsciously drew his chair nearer mine and leaned forward in intense interest. Not by a word, a breath did he interrupt, however. Even when the story was finished he observed the deliberate silence of the well-bred Oriental who must avoid haste and emotion as marks of the low-born who neither know nor follow the Rites which are the guide of Chinese life.

Finally, since I also was silent, he spoke calmly.

"This story interests more than yourself. As a man pulling on a silken thread may draw a great rope to his hand, so you with this slender clue have opened great mat-

ters. Prepare yourself to hear what will surprise you."

I bowed and thanked him, but first ventured the question whether he had ever seen or heard of this strange Buddhist art of perpetuating the pictures of the past, and whether he thought I might rely on what I had been told.

It was curious to hear his quiet voice dealing with hidden things and punctuated by the coarse shouts and laughter of the Boxer troops in the courtyard.

"My son, undoubtedly you may believe. There are temples in the North, more than one, where the Emperors and high officials thus may see the past recorded while the mind of man endures. There is also a secret place where a man may see the picture of his future, but of this I will not now speak. And of what you saw a part is known to me to be true. Now hear me. The Emperor Ch'ien Lung in his later days exalted to the highest honours a man named Ho, risen from the people, but well taught and of a swift brain. In the imperial service this Ho amassed such wealth that to this day he is remembered as the richest man in China. And the man who served this Ho and did his will far and near was your ancestor, John Mallerdean. It was through John Mallerdean that negotiations were opened with the English that finally led to their first mission being sent to Peking in 1795. So if Ho was a great man John Mallerdean was 'a small great man,' and he carried the Emperor's tablet of gold and went where he would on the errands of the Emperor and Ho, and great was his power with the English traders at Canton. But John Mallerdean had many enemies, because his master Ho grew so great that even the imperial princes feared him. It

is the truth that to Ho's son the Emperor gave an imperial princess for bride, and such an honour is like the too heavy fruit that breaks the branch it grows on, so, it was known that Ho would not be long in following when the aged Emperor should die. Ho himself knew this, and it is told that for years before the Emperor Ch'ien Lung ascended on the dragon (died) he had been gradually conveying a part of his great wealth into hiding in a temple unknown. And among that wealth was the mighty pearl known as 'The Glorious Good Omen' which excelled even the pearl worn in the imperial hat, which is called 'The Azure Dragon Instructing Posterity,' and also many noble rounded emeralds brought five hundred years ago across the desert from the Ural Mountains—emeralds of a value almost beyond purchase. And much beside."

I started. I had seen them. I knew where they lay now. The pearl of Good Omen I had not seen.

"You know them," he continued calmly. "It is well. Never until this moment has any man known where Ho's vanished treasure lay. It is possible, even certain, that more must be hidden than you saw. It is known, for it is recorded in the imperial edict announcing Ho's disgrace, that he possessed two hundred pearl neck chains, more than three thousand rubies of the greatest size, jewelled trees of coral and more than I can recall. But it is also recorded that much of this had vanished when the men of the Emperor plundered his hoards, nor did any man know by what means he had sent these costly matters into safety. Now the truth is before me. It was by the hand of John Mallerdean who, having the golden pass of the

Emperor Ch'ien Lung, could go where he would."

He paused and I meditated deeply. The Keiths—how did the Keiths come into the story? Could it be possible that part of the jewels were to have been sent to England for safety? Colonel Keith, if not John Mallerdean, was certainly bound for the *Arrogant,* a British warship. At all events it seemed—and here I own to a bit of disappointment—that the treasure after all was not John Mallerdean's. He was but an agent, it appeared. That discovery might have far-reaching consequences. I was about to speak when we saw the ruffians outside gathering their weapons and streaming out into the street, yelling like wild beasts famishing for blood. The frightful cries of men and women shrieking in vain for mercy answered them. Even Yang Lien sprang to his feet, and I made a rush for the door—mad to help somehow. He caught me by the coat, his face the colour of death.

"Stay here. Stir not on your life!" he said sternly. "I must go to the Palace and see the Benevolent Mother. What is my life or the life of any if this massacre can be stopped? But no foreigner must be seen, or she will never intervene. I will shelter you while a roof remains to me; there is no other choice for you now."

I implored him to delay if it were but for half an hour, for it was only too plain what was doing outside, but he put me quietly aside. Standing by the window I saw him hurrying through the Boxers who scarcely moved to make way for the old nobleman. It was evident that the displeasure of the Empress was commonly known already. I trembled for him—so short a step was it in China between power and death.

CHAPTER III

IMPOSSIBLE to say how long I waited nor the strangeness of that dreadful time. I had much to think of if I could have thought at all, but it was impossible. The Peking I knew was falling into visible ruin before my eyes. The thin crust of safety and daily habit was broken up to disclose the lava boiling beneath. I know this might happen in any great town and in many it must happen before this century is out—but, standing by the window and looking out on the brutal and hideous faces thronging there, I knew exactly the meaning of the lightly uttered words—"hell broke loose."

Now, when what I guess to be an hour had gone by, someone entered the room, moving as noiselessly as a leaf in the air. I heard nothing until he was at my side, and I swung round then to face a man, dressed in a long straight coat of sober grey silk, bowing low:

"Benevolence, I am come—" he began, and then started back, and I could see that behind the large horn spectacles he wore to conceal the defect, his eyes were utterly sightless.

"It is a foreigner," he muttered. "The great of our people do not move like that. The smell is different of the robe, the hair— Sir, I beg your august pardon, but I supposed that the noble Yang Lien was in this room. Compassionate a blind man and say where I can find him. It is more than urgent."

"He is gone out some time since," I said briefly.

"That is no foreigner's Chinese," he said low and anxiously. "Do I speak to a friend of Yang Lien's and to whom? Does it not say in the classics that the wise will always aid the blind since their eyes, closed to earthly sights, are open to secret things?"

"It is also said in the classics," I rejoined, "that the wise man's tongue is lame in unknown company, and these are times for care. Who are you who question me?"

"I am the Blind Man of Hupei!" he answered without a moment's hesitation. And then it flashed upon me. I knew—I had heard of him often in that house and in others—a man deprived of his sight by the cruelty of the Dowager Empress because on an unlucky day he had become possessed of a secret injurious to her honour. Up to that time he had been in high favour, an astrologist, a horoscopist without whose advice nothing could be done, who almost controlled her daily actions, but from that time a ruined and blinded outcast. On the spot she handed him over to the Palace attendants for torture, and his life would not have been worth a minute's purchase but for the strange fact that he had been born in the same hour and aspect of the planets as herself, and with all her courage she dared not put an end to his life that might be ominous for her own.

The Blind Man of Hupei! Yes, those eyes had seen many strange things before they were darkened, but the tongue did not dare to utter them. I knew I might speak, for Yang Lien had befriended the man in his misery. I looked at him with the deepest interest. A patient

ghostly face, profoundly intelligent, even lacking the spirit of the eyes, wan and hollow cheeked, tense with nerves and suffering. A remarkable man, a face to remember. I noted, and spoke.

"He is gone to seek an audience of the Dowager Empress."

He struck his hands together with a low moaning cry.

"O Goddess of Mercy, pity and help him! She is mad with rage and folly. As soon turn a starving tiger from a lamb as turn the Manchu woman from the slaughter of the foreigner. Even now in the lanes and byways the Boxers are massacring the native Christians. The streets are running with blood—"

He was interrupted by the most frightful outburst of cries in the city—Rachel weeping for her children if ever I heard it. A bugle had sounded, a shrill discordant note which was evidently a signal, and it was followed by the rattle of shots and these shrieks of despair. Again I made for the door—anything rather than listen passively. He caught me by the coat like Yang Lien, and with the same authority. I stared at him in astonishment.

"Stay; be still; whoever you are. What are cries when so much worse is at hand? Tell me your name, noble person, I entreat you. You are not of our people for though your tongue is native my senses, which cannot be cheated, acting for my lost eyes, tell me otherwise. If you would help the benevolent Yang Lien, be honest with me. I am the faithfullest of those who love him."

"I am John Mallerdean," I said with deep reluctance. I could not tell what to make of the man, but I knew Yang Lien had the highest opinion of him. He repeated

my name with a dazed air, passing his hand over the withered eyes.

"John Mallerdean? Are you a tall man with hair as black as our gown and dark eyes and straight black brows? Have you a white scar on the left temple? Have you a watch with a cross on it and four smaller crosses in the spaces? Have you—"

"Stop!" I interrupted, stemming the flow of questions. "I am the man you describe except for the scar. I have no scar."

"The watch?"

"Yes, I have the watch. What does this mean? I shall answer not one more question until I know your reasons."

"Strange—no scar!" he muttered. "But that was indelible. Am I dreaming or awake? In this eternal darkness how shall a man distinguish between fact and illusion!"

I began to think I was in company with a lunatic. I liked the Blind Man of Hupei much less than what I had heard of him.

"Obtuse and shallow slave that I am!" the dull voice muttered on. "John Mallerdean is dead a hundred years ago. The Flying Tiger river has washed his bones clean. Yet I have seen—I see him. And he and Ho laugh and mock me with the secret that the Imperial Lady would have spared my eyes to know."

I began to see a dim and doubtful light. The Empress—the Empress was on the track of the hidden riches! Then heaven help me! I adventured with the utmost caution.

"Had John Mallerdean a secret? He was of my venerated ancestors. I bow before his spirit." (It is thus one must speak in China of the family dead.)

"That is dutiful. That is well!" he replied eagerly, fixing what were once his eyes on my face. "Yes, a secret, a political secret, no more. You have no papers, nothing that speaks of it?"

"I have nothing that may be told to strangers," I replied stolidly. And then, with the booming of the guns about us, a wonderful thing happened. His features stiffened and fixed almost into a corpselike rigidity. His clasped hands relaxed and hung loosely down as his knees swayed under him, and he crumpled slowly backward into the great chair behind him. The strangest thing!—his head fell back, the neck sank into the shoulders. The Blind Man of Hupei was in the spirit—in the body no longer; the empty shell lay before me. Presently a thick voice, stumbling as if uncertain, gathering strength and certainty as it proceeded, broke from his lips:

"The noble Yang Lien. I see—I see. He nears the Forbidden City. Through the Gate of Secluded Peace he goes in. His face is sad and fixed. He pushes aside the attendants who would stop him. Li Lien-ying, the Empress's favourite, thrusts his body in front of him; he stretches out his arm. He says, 'You shall not enter. The Old Buddha is furious. She will kill you if your nobility enters.' He bars the way. But the noble Yang Lien goes on, on. He thrusts the big brute aside. 'I will see her Majesty. Make way for the State Councillor. Make way!' and Li Lien-ying falls back. So he goes on. I see Li Lien-ying hulking after him. O may

all the spirits of his ancestors, all the spirits of the dead Emperors, protect him now! He nears the Hall of Peaceful Longevity. He goes in. He holds his head high."

The words were so swift, so dramatic that they held me. I saw the scene he depicted as if I had been present. Yes, Yang Lien would hold his head high in the presence of death and that was what he went to meet. But hush! there was more.

"The Old Buddha sits on her state chair with the silken phœnixes above it. A girl is behind it, holding a cup—a beauty of the first order. Her coat is green satin embroidered with the Peaches of Immortality and willows. Her hair is night black, her eyes blue—blue as the roof tiles of the Temple of Heaven. She stares in horror as the old noble breaks his way in. The cup drops from her hands. It breaks.

" 'Sanctuary, sanctuary, your Majesty,' he cries. The Old Buddha rises, holding by her chair. She does not fear. She knows not what fear is. 'What sanctuary do you need?' she cries—'here in this forbidden place where you should not be. Why are you here?'

" 'To bring the truth to your Majesty, the last gift of a life spent in your service.' He makes the kowtow and advances on his knees. O spirits of the Emperors protect him!"

Clairvoyance. People talk of it glibly, but to see it thus is terrifying. I knew I was walking by this man's aid where I could never walk. I was in the presence of the Empress. And the girl? Black hair and sapphire eyes. Was my brain turning? No. He *saw*.

"Kneeling, he speaks: 'Your Majesty, your guns are turned on the legations. Humbly I recall to you that it is known to all the wise that these Boxers are miserable imposters. They have no strength, they have no magic. Only this morning forty Boxers were shot dead in Shuai Fu Lane and the altar of the magic was destroyed. Their Five Demon trick is child's play. They are fools and they will ruin your dynasty.'

"The Old Buddha rises, in her yellow satin coat. The jewels and pins in her headdress glitter. She is terrible. The Motherly Countenance is wild with fury. 'How dare you question my authority? Slave! Fool! These foreigners shall be exterminated before I eat my morning meal.'

"He does not waver. All men quail before the anger of the Empress, but he goes on: 'My beloved Mistress, I would save you. True, you may have these men murdered. They are few and surrounded by many, but when they are dead, millions will avenge them. Will France, America, England, Germany, Japan, bear this insult? Has not Confucius said, 'The person of the Envoy is sacred? Heaven will avenge him?'

"The girl, as if fainting, leans on the back of the chair and covers her face. They do not heed her. The Old Buddha screams with rage.

" 'If I can bear this, what must not be borne? Traitor, you cannot know that these foreign devils have sent me a dispatch, insolently written as if to a slave, demanding my abdication, and that ten thousand foreign troops should enter Peking to restore order. You cannot know this.'

" 'I know—I know. But it is a forgery. It was forged in the house of Prince Tuan, the patron of the Boxers. Your Majesty is as the swimmer caught in the smooth water gliding to the falls. Your ministers deceive you. Have pity on yourself, my august sovereign. Send a gracious message to the legations. Did not Confucius say, 'Display your benevolence to the strangers from afar?' Dismiss every Boxer, every Kansuh soldier from the city. They are looting and murdering your own faithful subjects also. Pause— No, *act,* ere it is too late.'

"The Empress throws her clenched hand above her head. 'Never!' she cries. 'These are the counsels of a dotard. Better go down in one desperate encounter than surrender my rights at the bidding of the foreigner. Speak not another word or you die.'

"But he will not be silent. O spirits of the great Emperors protect him! Li Lien-ying is stealing up. He grins like an ape for cruelty and malice. Alas for the noble—the fearless! He goes on:

" 'Extend your divine protection to your people whom these Boxers are murdering. They are like sheep led to the slaughter. We confront a war with the whole civilized world if the legations fall. Had the foreigners invaded our country, old as I am, I would have borne arms, but they are here in peace. It is madness, madness—' She interrupts him. She will not hear. 'Coward, coward!' she screams. 'I had better ask counsel from this girl—she would have more spirit, I swear. Tell me, Sië, * would you be trodden under foot by the foreign

* (pronounced See-ay.)

devils if you were Lady of the Great Inheritance? Shame him! Let a woman tell him his duty.'

"The girl lifts her head. Her blue eyes glitter like swords. She does not hear the Empress. 'He is right; he is right, oh, Benevolent Mother. Hear him!'

" 'Drag this wretched minion to the well outside the Ning Shou palace and fling her down. No—stay! Yang Lien, how know you the letter of the foreigners was a forgery?'

" 'Because, oh, Maternal Benevolence, I have seen it written.'

" 'Seen it? You lie. That could not be.'

" 'I have seen it through blind eyes—the eyes of the Blind Man of Hupei.' "

As the blind man uttered his own name a spasm tore him. He writhed horribly in his chair—strong convulsions wrenched his body like those of epilepsy. Then he relaxed. A slow monotonous voice from his lips uttered these words heavily as if each weighed like iron:

" 'Then,' said the Empress, 'he is a man greatly gifted. A man of terror. Would I had not driven him from me!' "

His head swayed aside. He was in a deep sleep.

If I wrote for a year I could never express how that scene affected me. The impression might pass, but at that instant I felt I had seen the whole thing. The raging woman, the steadfast man, the brave girl. And was it possible that in this wild vision I had struck the trail I sought? And was she found only to be lost for ever? The well in the courtyard of the Ning Shou palace! Frightful tales ran about Peking of that well and what

its black depths could tell. What to do with the blind man—how to stimulate him to speech!

I leaned over him; in a soft monotone I questioned him.

"The girl? Did Li Lien-ying drag her away? Did Yang Lien plead with the Empress once more?" I went on, repeating these words, softly, loudly, insistently. Not a sound in answer. Hopeless. The Number One boy of the household came in and, after having made his obeisance to me, looked critically at the blind man.

"The sight is past," he said. "In this noble malady it is now necessary to apply water to his temples and administer a restorative. Else he may depart to the Nine Springs, and my lord would not lose him for many ounces of gold."

After this sententious opinion he departed and returned with a cloth wrung out in hot water—the custom of China—and laid it turban-wise about the passive head. It gave a strangely Indian look to the sad Mongol face. From a small bottle, he dripped a few unpleasant black drops through the lips. Then saluted me again.

"He will now recover," he said, and faded unobtrusively away.

I sat and watched—a queer sight. Faint thrills ran along the nerves of the face, like the trembling of leaves. The breath fluttered, stopped, and fluttered on. Finally he raised himself wearily in the chair. After a long silence he spoke very faintly:

"I smell the coming of the evening. It is late. I have been I know not where. Is the noble Yang Lien returned?"

"You remember nothing?"

"What should I remember, excellent stranger? I have these fits, and, alas for me! they hold me longer since the Maternal Benevolence deprived me of my eyes. I knock my head on the floor and entreat your forgiveness."

"Your piercing intelligence appeared," I said slowly, "to accompany the noble Yang Lien to his audience with the Empress."

He turned his face vacantly on me.

"It was in my dull understanding when the fit took me, but I know no more. Have I your august leave to depart?"

"You inflict regret upon me by your determination," I replied, in the best style of the Rites.

He left the room as noiselessly as he had entered. After a minute's thought I summoned the Number One boy.

"Does that honourable person distinguish the house with his residence in it?"

"Undoubtedly, Excellency. He is the guest of my noble master."

Time drifted by and Yang Lien did not return. I waited in terrible anxiety. The Old Buddha was quite capable of ordering his execution on the spot, and Li Lien-ying of carrying it out. Yet could she dare such a stroke? I knew that some of the princes realized the frightful danger of the course she was taking. I tried to calm myself—to hope the best. But it was a difficult task, for as the sun began to sink, the Boxer troops poured back into the courtyard, devil-faced, ragged, shouting, swearing the lowest oaths, dripping with blood,

drunk with slaughter. Far be it from me or any other man to chronicle what I learned that night of their dealings with those "secondary devils who have eaten the new religion," i. e., Chinese who have become Christians. And with many more with whom they had not even that poor excuse for massacre. They defiled the place. They made earth hideous.

About that time Yang Lien returned. I watched from the window with what dignity he passed through those swinish hordes. I scarcely think he saw them. His fine old face was concentrated on some deep inward thought, and he came through them like a man through a field of wheat. Strange and terrible the extremes of human nature! I saw them then.

He came in and saluted me courteously and ordered the evening meal to be presented. I had noticed how still the house was. Naturally in all my many visits I had known nothing of the women's quarters, but sometimes a birdlike cry, a sweet laughter, had reached me through closed doors. Now all was still as death. He noticed this himself, and sighed.

"The house is quiet. I have sent my household to my house in the country. Well indeed that I did, when I behold the courtyard now. A word, a sign of my Mistress's disfavour and we should be looted and burned to the ground."

"Well indeed!" I echoed, and there was a sad silence. He said little while we ate our dinner. True to Chinese traditions of dignity, it was served with all the formalties, though the courses were lessened in deference to the misery the times were to many; as a distinguished Man-

chu wrote, rice had become as dear as pearls and firewood more precious than cassia buds.

We executed the usual ceremonies of inviting each other to the most honourable seat and declining it for ourselves. But at last it was over. We raised our chopsticks to our foreheads, and then laid them upon our cups, and adjourned to the room of reception where I had passed the afternoon.

For a moment he stood, looking thoughtfully out into the courtyard where the men were sitting and lying by little fires they had lit to cook the food provided at his cost. Then turned to me.

"My son, there are certain things I would say, for there will be little chance of talk between you and me after this night. The hand of the Empress is heavy on me."

I stared at him in consternation that forbade words. There was finality in his tone and it carried dread to my inmost spirit. He spoke with perfect serenity.

"This person has the ill fortune to disagree with her Majesty's policy. True, I am not alone. Jung Li, her counsellor from youth, entreats her to dismiss these Boxers and release the legations instantly, but, most miserable to tell, her supernaturally brilliant intellect is so possessed by belief in the magic powers of their leaders that she will hear nothing. Their fate is, therefore, so far as my humble perception can judge, sealed, and with it the fate of her dynasty. It is my ignorant conviction that in twenty-five years' time there will be no Manchu Emperor in Peking and that China will be given over to rapine and disorder."

For the first time his voice trembled. Not for himself, but for his country. For a few moments we were silent.

"My honoured friend and father, what is magic?" I ventured to say. "What is true and what false? The Blind Man of Hupei was with me after you departed to the Palace, and he described to me all that took place; and if his tale be true, then, though I am no believer in follies like the Boxers, I must own there is more than I can understand."

He started slightly when I named the blind man.

"He was with you, my son? What did he say? But, no. I will tell you what I dare of the interview and if his report was true, I will tell you more."

I listened with stark amazement, almost with fear, as he took up the tale. Need I repeat it? From the moment he had entered the Gate of Secluded Peace all was as the blind man had seen it. There was no flaw in word or detail. To me, who was a student of psychology, it still appeared supernatural. But the interest of the story overtopped even that aspect of it.

"Was the girl killed?" I cried out, when he came to that point.

"No, she was spared. She is a favourite with the Empress and that saved her life for the time."

"Was she forgiven?"

"I cannot tell. She was forgotten, for when the blind man was named by me, the Benevolent Mother paused and said, 'He is a man greatly gifted. A man of terror. Would I had not driven him from me.' And from that saying sprang a thought which I will tell you."

And still the guns were booming at the legations, while I listened to this evidence of the powers before which brute force is as nothing. *How* had that blind man seen and known? But the quiet voice continued:

"Son of my friend, my days on earth are few. The breath is in my nostrils, and the headsman's arm is raised. My own son has taken my household to the Villa. They are safe until this madness passes. But he cannot return. The Old Buddha would slay him, too. Will you, therefore, acting as a son, hear my last words and report them to him?"

Who can describe these strange and poignant moments? I, at all events, shall not try. I managed to control all signs of pity and grief. Quiet as himself, I ventured to touch his honoured hand as I assured him of my devotion. He thanked me in simple words and went on:

"It is my intention to memorialize the Empress again to-morrow, for since leaving the Palace I hear that she has offered a reward for every foreign man, woman and child brought to her. They are to be instantly executed. The Emperor tried to move her, but is powerless. He is on tenterhooks when he speaks to her and the sweat runs down his face. But I do not fear her because I do not fear death, and it is needful that she should hear the truth. I shall ask her what glory we can gain by the slaughter of women and children, and suggest that they and the foreign ministers be guarded to the coast and embarked in safety."

He told me more, that I need not repeat, of his intentions, but enough to show me he was a doomed man.

Every one in Peking who knew anything of the Old Buddha could have foreseen that. But I could not insult him by dissuading him. It was his plain duty as a Counsellor of the Crown. To fail would be to rank himself with the rats and foxes of the Palace who would be the first to desert the Empress when her policy brought its inevitable ruin. Next he detailed to me his wishes for his burial, that matter so near to a Chinese heart, and gave me instructions as to the even more important safeguarding of the ancestral tablets. He told me where his remaining treasure was buried, and then, having discharged all his worldly obligations with the final message to his son, he turned to outside interests once more.

"Son of my friend, you have tasted the strange power of the blind man. I have a hope that when I am dead she may send for him. His visions are true—true even in dealing with the future, which is a marvel hard to comprehend. And before I left the palace I said to her: 'He has the divine sight.' Yes, she will send for him, and it may be that he will check the madness which has seized her brilliant intelligence. But she will not lose face by doing it in my lifetime, because I warned her before in vain. This, too, will hasten my death. For yourself, after to-morrow this house will be no refuge for you. It will fall with its master. And where shall you find safety? That thought will trouble my last moments."

I implored him not to be concerned. I said I had good hope that my thorough knowledge of the two languages, Manchu and Chinese, would safeguard me. I had been used to masquerading about the country as a

native. He must not give it a thought. Hakka, too. I was well safeguarded with speech.

But his kindness had given it many thoughts. He said earnestly:

"The only way this ignorant person can suggest is that you should attach yourself to the blind man and follow his counsels. He will have influence yet with the Kindly Mother. I have opened the way. He knows many secrets and his inner sight is a tower of strength. I will now call him and commit you solemnly to him."

He was summoned, and meanwhile I asked if my noble host could tell me anything of this girl Sië, who had shown such courage in the presence of her terrible mistress. He knew nothing. He had never seen her before, but he added she was very beautiful and her dark blue eyes were like the plumage of the kingfisher—a strange thing for a noble Manchu maiden. I then asked Yang Lien his opinion of the blind man's powers.

"They are not magic in the sense that they are concerned with spirits and demons. It is the inner knowledge that is handed down from one incarnation to another and from life to life. It is a part of the Universal Wisdom. When a man realizes that he is a part of the Whole, he sees and knows through all material obstacles, for they are illusion, and the man who is instructed is unhindered by them."

Is this a solution? I could not tell then, but I have often revolved it since, and I believe it to be the key.

In a few minutes the blind man entered and made his lowly salutations. He was full of trembling anxiety to

hear how his protector had sped at the Palace, and evidently all memory of his sight had passed like breath from a mirror. In a few brief words Yang Lien spoke of his own danger, and still more of the danger to the State and asked, if the Empress should send for the blind man, if he would obey, for if not he, Yang Lien, would find measures to have him safeguarded out of the city that very night.

Without an instant's hesitation he said he would go. Remembering his fate and looking on those sightless eyes, I marvelled at the man's courage. Few would have acted as he did. For, if he displeased the Old Buddha by his clairvoyance—and in that supernormal state the truth would certainly out—the lingering death was the best he could hope for.

Then, very impressively Yang Lien commended me to him. He had asked my permission to tell him of my quest, and, if we were to work together, I knew a clear understanding was necessary; so I agreed, and the whole strange story was unfolded to the blind man. He heard it in dead silence, though when John Mallerdean's name was mentioned I saw once more that for some unknown reason it started some connection in his mind. Then they consulted together and it was agreed that my hair should be trimmed Hakka fashion and certain alterations made in my dress and appearance that I might pass for the blind man's Hakka secretary and assistant. He had had one until quite lately when the Boxers on their way from Tientsin had murdered him. His blindness of course made an attendant necessary. Then, for it

was growing late, and quiet settling down over even the desecrated courtyard, we were about to separate, when Yang Lien asked a last question:

"The Court of Astronomers has observed a conjunction of stars which, it is declared, augurs ill for the dynasty. Has your superior intelligence had any reason to concur with this opinion?"

The blind man made a solemn gesture with his right hand:

"When your Excellency within a few days encounters the august shade of the late Emperor by the Yellow Springs, I beseech you to declare to him that his cruellest fears are fulfilled, for his widow the Empress has doomed his house to ruin."

Nothing more was said. We separated in silence and dismay.

Next day Yang Lien memorialized the Empress in an address which should be historical as an impeachment. He spared her in nothing save that he blamed some of her ministers rather than herself for the tragic pass to which matters had come. He sketched for her the only course that might yet save the country; and, expressing the hope that she might follow it, the memorial ended thus:

"And if this be done, smiling shall I go to my death and enter the realms of the departed. In a spirit of uncontrollable indignation and alarm I present this memorial with tears and beg that your Majesty may deign to peruse it."

So he signed his own death warrant, and calmly dispatched it to the Palace.

Peking was in a frightful condition that day—many parts of the city a mere shambles. I was able through means which even now I dare not disclose, for heaven only knows when they may be useful again, to communicate with a friend in the besieged British Legation and convey news of Yang Lien's memorial, warning them that he believed the Empress would soon pretend a change of heart and wish for their deliverance. But, I added on my own responsibility, let nothing induce them to trust to this appearance. I finished with the word "Cawnpore," which I knew he and all would understand because it referred to a frightful episode in the Indian Mutiny of 1856, when a mistaken trust in the word of the Nana Sahib led to the massacre of the English men, women and children of Cawnpore.

That done, by Yang Lien's chivalrous care for our safety, the blind man and I left his house at noon, but separately, each taking his own way, he to the house of a kinsman in the neighbourhood of the Hatamen Street, I to a little-known Buddhist temple on the outskirts of the city. There I passed the next two days, making all the preparations advised by Yang Lien, who had known the priest and had given me a written command to him. With him I secreted the papers Yang Lien had given me for his family until I should be able to get them out of the city. My dress and complexion were most skilfully changed.

Early next morning we had news that Yang Lien was sentenced to death "for favouring the foreigner and causing dissension in the Palace." Privately we had news that in her "divine wrath" the Empress declared that he

should be torn asunder by chariots driven in opposite directions, but this was commuted to instant decapitation. In spite of the entreaties of the priest, I determined I would attend the execution, for however it wrung my heart I felt that one friend at least should be there, and moreover there might be some last word he might wish to send to his family.

So I went to the fearful place, and none suspected that the unassuming Hakka gentleman who stood unmoved when the prisoner paused beside him to say farewell to the Manchu duke who superintended the execution, was an Englishman—his heart torn with pain and shame for the country that could endure to see one of her noblest die a death of ignominy. He looked in my direction gravely and made an almost imperceptible sign with his hand. No more, for he would not risk my life, but I knew he was glad of my presence. He said aloud: "I die innocent. To die is only to return home"—and the base duke stepped forward as if to strike him. Then and not till then I turned my face away.

The rest is silence. But so may I, so may we all, meet the Inevitable when it faces us, with the quiet heroism which, having settled its affairs in this world, turns with a steadfast calm to the next. The memory of the just is blessed.

CHAPTER IV

I MADE my way back to the temple with thoughts I will not write, and passing through the streets saw much to justify his certainty of the ruin at hand. I must not sully this page with stories of the bloodshed and rapine that met me at every turn. Men were talking openly of the downfall of the legations as near at hand. I knew better, but was in fearful anxiety as to how long their resistance could last.

Next morning an unobtrusive Hakka joined the blind man at his kinsman's house. He had announced my coming and all was prepared. I was presented to the brother, a man older than himself, kindly and simple in his ways, and a room was appointed me. There were no women in the house. Like all far-seeing people, he had sent his women off at the approach of the Boxers, and where their refuge was I never knew. There was not a single article of value in the house. There, too, they had made their preparations. The very chopsticks we ate with were wooden, the floors were bare. I told the blind man all particulars of the end and watched the slow tears distil from his sightless eyes—a pitiful thing to see.

"It now behooves us," he said, "to carry on the tradition of so much worth. My own mind is made up."

We waited on events and that day had news that the Empress had sent a magnificent gift of fruit and vege-

tables to the legations with a most conciliatory and gracious message, and that in "the strict seclusion of the Palace" she had ordered large sums of money to be shared among the Boxers. Again I sent the word "Cawnpore" to the British Legation.

My new master devoted the evening to giving me the necessary instructions for my attending him in the palace. My name was Yuan. I was a devout Buddhist skilled in charms and incantations. Signals were arranged between us in readiness for events to be told later. I also had the faculty of the second sight under certain conditions. I was a literary man, and took no interest in politics. I knew I could play this part if I kept within certain limits, and since the blind man realized these I knew I was pretty safe. I asked his own name, and after a minute's hesitation he told me it was Wei. I cannot tell if this was true. I took the opportunity of asking how he knew the name of John Mallerdean, and he replied that the answer to that question must "await the appointed day." I accepted this, for I had no other way. I will say here and now that the more I saw of him the more grateful I felt to my dead friend for having put me in his hands. He was an honest man, a true patriot, and possessed of gifts so extraordinary that they opened a whole new chapter of experience to me.

The next morning, as we walked in the little courtyard, listening to the guns and, alas, to the cries that sometimes pierced even their sullen roar, I saw an imperial official approaching attended by a dozen Manchu guards, and hastily warned my master. Not a flicker of ex-

pression passed over his blind face. We paced stolidly up and down speaking of indifferent matters until they entered the gateway with the screen of stone skewed to ward off the coming of evil spirits who must always enter in a straight line.

Then I started, as if I had only just seen them, and bowed with the deepest respect, warning my master aloud at the same time of the honour at hand. He also bowed in reverent silence.

The newcomer wore a corpulent presence and a plutocratic expression. I knew him well by sight—one of the basest of the rats and foxes who had made his millions by pandering to the evil doings of the imperial men and women of the dying dynasty. The Manchus had ousted the Mings when moral decay weakened them, and now their own turn was at hand. How could it be otherwise when evil minions like the one before me had a determining voice in their councils?

In a high nasal voice he began.

"The words of the Empress. The Kindly Mother commands that the Blind Man of Hupei, honoured by all the world for his divine gifts, should forthwith attend her in the Palace of the Jewelled Phœnixes. Rooms of honour shall be set apart for him. The choicest—"

To my amazement, to my consternation, the blind man instantly towered into passion.

"What!" he cried. "I reverence the August Empress —but at a distance. She has deprived me of my eyes. She has condemned me to eternal darkness. Can even the Divine Empress suppose that a man so treated will exercise his art on her behalf? Does her Majesty be-

lieve that the attendant spirits will be at the service of one who could use their instrument so vilely? No—I can die, but cannot yield. Convey to the Empress the reverent salutation of the lowest of her slaves, and say that the blind man cannot come."

Blank amazement on the official faces to match my own. What? Refuse? The Empress?

A pause. The blind man turned a resolute back and made toward the house. I followed his example, quaking, I own. The official caught me by the sleeve.

"Who are you?"

"The attendant Yuan."

"Then persuade this madman to hear reason. If I return without him the Kindly Mother will skin me alive. And what she will do to him and to you passes thought. He must come. He shall come if we drag him through the streets."

Genuine fear was in the man's eyes. Suddenly I perceived the strength of the blind man's position and his reasons for acting thus. I assumed the majesty of the wizard, in the Chinese of a man who is used to speak Hakka.

"You may drag him through the streets, but you cannot drag the spirits. Her Majesty may slay him; but what is death to such a one, and the spirits she cannot slay? Behold—see there!" I pointed to the dolphin finials of the Temple of Lao-tze at hand. There was nothing, of course, but no matter. It is well known in China that spirits perch on these finials. They are there for that purpose.

"The greatest prince in the Empire would not dare to act as you and your master are doing now!" he said, with a white glare at me.

"Probably not," said I. "They have reasons for fear, we have not."

Bluff, unmitigated bluff, but it answered.

He moderated his tone.

"If your master understood what rich rewards—"

"That would be ineffectual. We waste your inestimable time. Permit us to return to our studies."

I stared at him with a face expressionless as a muffin. The situation was really humorous. Of course I knew that China is ruled by superstition, but I had not had the wit to size up the situation so swiftly as my master. No matter, I understood it thoroughly now.

"It seems, then, that we must return to her Majesty. Her divine wrath will blaze like the flame consuming the stubble," said the official, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other. I vouchsafed no answer, but pursued my stately way to the house. Again he intercepted me and grasped my sleeve.

"If with prostrations and abasements we besought the divine sage—"

I shook myself free and proceeded. The soldiers had stood stolidly by and now right-about-faced for retreat. The official stood for five minutes or more, evidently hoping for mercy. At last the whole party disappeared.

"They are gone," said the blind man in a tone of satisfaction when I rejoined him and the outer gate shut.

"They are gone, oh, wise and benevolent!" said I.

"But pardon my ignorance and reveal whether the next arrival may not be an order for our execution. It appears very possible to me."

"Young man, no!" he replied, using the Chinese term employed by a teacher to his disciple. "Do I not know the Manchu woman? Had I gone easily, she would have neither feared nor trusted me, nor could I have made my terms for entering her service. It would have been impossible, for instance, to take an attendant of my own with me. But she who fears neither man nor God, fears every devil, every ill omen. She believes devoutly in the elixir of immortality, in the elixir of youth. She resembles that Hwang-ti emperor who sent his ship to discover those golden isles where dwell beneficent spirits whose joy it is to give the draught of immortality to all who reach their happy shores. When we stand in her presence hear how I will speak with her. But tell me this—was all the talk with that villain in Chinese?"

"My master, yes," said I, following his example and employing the honorific used by the disciple. "What else should it be? Rough Chinese."

He leaned forward, impressive and stern.

"Then guard it as a secret more precious than pearls that you can speak Manchu. We may learn weighty secrets thus. You read and write it also?"

"Not so well as Chinese, but sufficient."

"That is well indeed, and also a secret. I shall, of course announce in the Palace that you are a Hakka man, and your knowledge of Chinese limited. That will account for anything suspicious which may be noticed in your speech or appearance."

I own that touched me up. I thought my Chinese perfect and what with the swarthy yellow complexion his instructions had produced, a handsome queue and the right dress, I felt sure that even in Kiang-si I might pass muster for a Hakka man of some standing, and how much more in Peking. I took some pride in my skill with three or four of the Chinese dialects, and said as much. He replied instantly.

"Your skill in our dialects is amazing to the mind. But the spy system in the Palace is beyond your imagining. When I announce you as a Hakka, they will probably send for a Kiang-si man to verify your appearance. Speak Chinese then only for the needs of life with them, and with me speak Hakka. And let your knowledge of Manchu be a secret of the dead."

I instantly agreed. Then, after reflection, he went on:

"Now—for that rat will soon return—ask me any question you will, for in the Palace none must be asked. Eyes and ears are all about men when most they think themselves secret."

I reflected a moment.

"My master, what is your purpose in entering the Palace? Mine, you know. Am I worthy to be told yours?"

"Mine is to aid my country, and to that end to do my part toward undermining the dynasty. Corrupt and vile and faithless, there is not a Manchu prince or princess left with whom an honest man can treat. That they ever conquered and ousted the Mings was ruin for my country. That villain who came but now, low as he is in birth and station, rolls in wealth gained through blood-

shed and treachery and worse. But he sways the Old Buddha. You will see another, young and fierce, a tiger cub, who rules the Empress Consort. When that woman comes to power, as she must when the Old Buddha 'ascends the chariot drawn by fairies,' the dynasty is done —or will be if men like myself lend it their aid. The Emperor is a pitiable weakling. All men who love their country must combine against these degenerates. When last I was in the Palace I was young. I saw these things but accepted them as inevitable. Now, inspired by the patriotism of my noble patron Yang Lien, I return—a scourge, a flame of destruction! I will abase the woman in the dust before me—I who know her crimes!"

His voice was low and fierce, and there was a wildness in it and in his expression that for a moment gave me an uncomfortable doubt of his sanity. To enter those dark and dreadful mazes with a lunatic! That would be a tempting of Providence far beyond my intentions.

I may say he *heard* my thought, so quick were his perceptions. He turned his white intelligent face on me with perfect quiet.

"Young man, my anger will never lead me a step aside from my purpose. Once in the years gone by it did, and I paid for it with my sight. You are safe with me. Am I safe with you? Can you see cruelties and shames in silence—nay with outward indifference?"

"I can. I will," I said. "But one question more: Have you a personal vengeance in view, my master?"

"None," he said firmly. "What is my sight compared with my hope? I rejoice that I have lost it, for it gives me the powers I need. Now be silent. It will not be

long before they return and I wish to collect my thoughts. Follow my lead in all I say and do—when we are where we would be."

He then serenely dismissed the subject, and turned his thoughts elsewhere.

He took out his rosary and softly repeated a Buddhist prayer, long and monotonous, then with the amazing memory of the Oriental, he began to recite in Chinese the Lotus Sutra (scripture). I listened with pleasure to its ancient beauty. The guns were roaring about the legations. They were firing also at the French cathedral and the never-ceasing shrieks and cries tore the air, but these ancient and holy words seemed to make a little place of peace about us:

"The Gate of Infinite Law
Makes clear all things.
It gives a haven of calm joy
Of salvation, protection.
And those who know—
They pass from death to life.
You who are weary
May be made glad—"

So it went on, a wonder of beauty. As the flower of its name grows from black mud, so this celestial truth protested eternal righteousness in the very gates of hell. From that moment I knew he was a devout Buddhist and what he said I believed.

The time had not seemed long when there was a noise of men outside the gates, and the double wings were thrown open and into the little courtyard was borne a

kind of sedan chair with yellow curtains, and from this, with the help of two servants stepped a man gross and corpulent with a court necklace of tasseled jade and amber. I deciphered the dragons with the swastika border in the great circles of embroidery upon his breast and reported an imperial prince, but I was not certain which.

"Describe him," said my master briefly. I did so.

"It is Prince Tsai, the patron of the Boxers," he said. "Lead me out to meet him."

For a moment my heart beat quick as I wondered if my disguise were good enough to deceive the experience of a Manchu prince. I thought it was. The change of complexion to a swarthy yellow, the Chinese trimmed hair, the touch of paint in the angle of the eye, were all well done. I had hardly known myself in the glass. And on my knowledge of manners and customs I thought I could rely. Again, my master perceived my thought.

"Talk little. Follow my guidance and you are safe," he said. "Now lead me out."

I took his hand with a reverent air and we made for the courtyard where the prince stood with his attendants about him. We both made the kowtow, an attention which he received with the utmost graciousness. It was evidently not to be our execution—as yet.

"Illuminated sage!" he began. "The attendant An Ling has returned to the palace with the tidings that you refused to obey her sacred Majesty's command. Doubtless the ignorance of a dull and illiterate personage misrepresented the classical correctness of your attitude. Consequently, I come from her Majesty that there may

be no misapprehension which might cause regrettable anger in the benevolent imperial mind."

There was just the sub-acid hint of a threat in this honey. I stood with my eyes fixed humbly on the ground. My master answered gravely.

"Your highness, in former years, long gone by, I served her Divine Majesty, humbly, but with fidelity. My reward was this" (he touched his eyes) "and, not being a military person and entirely unpossessed of courage, I fear to enter her imperial presence lest again I have the misfortune to displease her. I live in poverty congenial to my studies with this my disciple and ask but peace and retirement."

"Man of wisdom and discretion, these are sentiments that all must honour. But her Majesty has heard marvels of your wisdom, and in anxiety even to the shedding of tears, the Benign Mother commands your coming. Quiet shall be secured you—rooms and a private garden for meditation, attendants to serve you—"

He paused, and my master calmly rejoined:

"That alone would make my position impossible. I go nowhere without my attendant."

"Chinese, as you know, are not permitted as attendants in the Palace. Unless indeed under the most stringent circumstances."

My master spoke firmly.

"Your Highness will condescend to command your attendants to withdraw out of hearing."

A signal was made, and they all herded off, staring at us curiously. Then he went on.

"The attendance I need is of a different order, and none must behold my secrets who cannot share them. This my disciple is a Hakka man, poor in this world's wealth, but gifted in supernatural matters. His own tongue and a slender knowledge of the colloquial of the Northern capital, sufficient for the actual needs of life, are his all. How, then, could he parley with the polished and literary attendants of the Palace or be admitted to the presence of the Holy and Auspicious Mother? Yet without his aid, this humble blind person is helpless both in his private life and his science. Your Highness will therefore condescendingly perceive the impossibility of my obeying you."

The prince hesitated for a moment, but persevered. Need I relate the discussion that followed, each of the two outdoing the other in wordy civilities and apparent determination? At last Prince Tsai triumphed. Many taels of silver were conditioned for. The Empress, who believed in no man's virtue, would have suspected some deep-laid plot if money had not been an outstanding feature of the bargaining. Absolute immunity for the pair of us was guaranteed even if his predictions or counsel should be unlucky ("For who," said my master devoutly, "can control the great evil spirits?"). He was to be permitted my attendance, provided I would engage to remain entirely in the part of the Palace assigned to us and never to leave it without permission. And finally, we were to be honourably dismissed when my master should feel he could aid her imperial Majesty no further.

"But so great is my desire for repose and study that even now would this worm disobey the Benevolent

Mother's commands and, crawling into his hole be lost, were it not that I have already had visions which may be of moment."

Prince Tsai instantly turned and beckoned his attendants. Two more sedan chairs (though naturally without the yellow curtains of royalty) were brought forward, and, only giving us a few moments to collect our actual necessaries, we were soon swinging along at a good pace to the Forbidden City.

What were my feelings. Confusion worse confounded. I wanted time, time to lay down a fuller code of signals, clear instructions—many things without which I knew I should shipwreck. And here were we, swinging along to the Wei-Men gate of the Forbidden City, and I feeling as though every Chinese or Hakka word and notion in my head had taken wing for ever.

We drew up after what seemed a long time at a side entrance, and I got nimbly out to give my hand with every sign of obedience to my master. Only filial reverence in China can exceed that due to a teacher, and if I had been attending the Emperor I could scarcely have been more obsequious. He paused a moment at the entrance and said aloud in Prince Tsai's hearing:

"May my entrance at these doors be propitious to the great pure dynasty. Is it not a saying of the divine sage, Confucius, 'Study to remove resentments and angry feelings'? I come therefore with a free heart."

The prince immediately went off to announce to the Empress that the fish was caught, and we were conducted to our rooms by a supple-tongued and handed attendant to whom I took a warm and instant dislike—a fawning

fox-faced hypocrite if ever I saw one. He ushered us with a flourish into two quiet little rooms looking out on a lovely little garden, and beyond that a massive and heavily decorated pavilion, supported on pillars of richly carved wood, the noble roof sweeping up into points at the corners.

"Your noble and illustrious sightlessness renders the view immaterial to your wisdom, illuminated one," said he; "but the air is healthful and peaceful. Your disciple will inform me of your venerated needs. May I have the felicity of knowing his honourable name?"

This had been foreseen, and I was announced as Yuan Lai, a Hakka gentleman. I set to work at once to place our few possessions in order, and the attendant left us and returned speedily with tea and little sweet cakes. I purposely made my Chinese clumsy and slow. Even when we were alone, not a word did the blind man utter that all the world might not have heard. He deplored in moving Hakka (which he did not speak as well as I) being thus dragged from our studies, but said that in the anxious position in which the Empress's divine intelligence was now placed no loyal subject but must place all his powers at her disposal. We walked slowly awhile in the garden while waiting a summons from her Majesty, for it was announced that she would see us at the Hour of the Monkey, i. e., between 3 and 5 P. M. Later the fox-faced attendant brought word that she was engaged on urgent business with Duke Lan and the interview would be in the Hour of the Dog—that is, between 7 and 9 P. M.

CHAPTER V

THE Blind Man of Hupei was perfectly calm and unruffled. When we returned from the garden, he sat down and again recited softly portions of the Lotus Scripture:

> "Do any desire to cast away their weariness,
> To abide with me?
> Bid them harken to this Scripture.
> Those who have not heard this Word
> Are far from divine Wisdom.
> But my dwelling-place
> Is filled with mercy.

Beautiful, but who could listen in the shadow of the terrible Empress? I confess my nerves were on tenter-hooks with the waiting and suspense. At last the summons came, and the blind man rose and adjusted his robe, and I gathered up a lacquer box which he had given to my care, and taking his hand in mine we followed Fox-face.

"Young man, my disciple!" said the blind man in low clear tones, "be reverent in the presence of the mighty. Do as I do, in all things conduct yourself by my example. Make the ninefold abasement, and be grateful in heart to this discreet person who thus conducts us to the Heavenly Presence."

I uttered a humble assent, clasping my hands and bow-

ing till they touched the ground and thus, through many and bewildering ways we were led to our goal. At the door, the blind man hurriedly warned me that I must not raise my eyes to the Motherly Countenance. The next moment, a curtain was raised and let fall, and we stood before her.

Instantly we made the ninefold kowtow, and after that advanced on our knees. And if there is a more difficult, absurd and impossible way of progressing in this world I should be glad to hear of it. I was obliged to guide the blind man by holding his sleeve, else heaven knows to what corner of the vast Hall of Purple Light he might not have wandered. All fours would have been a million times easier and I could but lament that abasement to the knee only was considered sufficiently degrading. However, shuffling along as best we could, eventually we got within speaking range, and a remarkably sweet and pleasant voice addressed our then prostrate forms in Chinese and bade us rise to our knees again.

Of course I saw her Majesty. A man can always see what he wishes even with his eyes fixed on a given point. As a matter of fact, I saw her very well.

On a stately chair, with a kind of splendid panelling at the back of it, but not shadowing the head, sat a comely, matronly looking woman whose age I should have guessed at forty or thereabouts if I had not known her to be much older. The wicked had certainly flourished like a green bay tree in this case, for no placid wife and mother busied with little household kindnesses could show a more unlined and serene brow than this terrifying person, the stories of whose misdeeds ran from

end to end of China. She was dressed in some magnificent stuff illuminated, as it were, with all the fabulous creatures of Chinese mythology, and about her neck were chains of pearls linked and relinked and knotted, so that they formed a gorgeous decoration falling about her shoulders and bosom and nearly to the waist. The illusion of placid maternity was increased by the smooth banding of her black hair on the ears and forehead and a kind of Russian-looking headdress, ovals of extreme magnificence arranged like a crown with long embroidered silk lappets falling over her shoulders in front. It is an amazing thing, but the word that occurred to me was "respectable looking." Yes, the terrible Old Buddha, the Empress of China, suggested that idea. Exactly as her Majesty Queen Victoria did in bygone days. Only the Oriental had not her alarming dignity. I thought the face had an almost stupid benevolence, dull and uninspiring, between the matronly lappets.

At one side of her chair stood the Empress Consort—her own niece whom she had forced upon the unhappy Emperor much against his will; a plain young woman of most unprepossessing expression, with a long face and rabbit mouth, topped by narrow, alert, suspicious little eyes. Yet I knew I was face to face with power present and future in this lady, who was said to have inherited her aunt's abilities and tendencies in perfection. On the other side of the chair stood the Dowager Empress's favourite attendant, Li Lien-ying, a gross, corpulent man in an astonishing filigree headdress like a woman, and behind it a young lady standing stiffly like a charming doll, in a long embroidered coat. I glimpsed a beautiful

face. I could see no more for the moment—I dared not. Li Lien-ying's eyes, mere slits in his coarse face, were nevertheless very alert peepholes, and every vibration of the air in the place cried: "Caution."

But the Empress was speaking:

"Welcome to a faithful servant. When the punishment is humbly accepted the sin is forgotten and the sun of imperial favour shines again. Illuminated blind one, I have need of your wisdom. Yang Lien, the traitor now dead, informed me that with the years your celestial wisdom had grown and that neither walls nor leagues are a bar to your inward vision. Is that wisdom at the service of your Empress?"

Nobody seemed to speak or think of the Emperor, his wife least of all. All power was centred in the woman in the chair. The blind man kowtowed again and I followed suit.

"Then here, now, and in this most inauspicious hour, see for me. Declare the truth. Are the legations about to fall and the cursed followers to die the death, or will they live to work my ruin? Speak."

Never raising his eyes, the blind man made slow reply.

"Will the divine wisdom of the Heavenly Empress accept the truth? Will she hear with patience what is unpleasing if it be true? This low and obscure person cannot tell what the great wise spirits will utter. Is his head safe if they prophesy evil tidings?"

She leaped to her feet, and I was so startled that for a second I glanced up at the risk of my life. Never again did I believe in the Motherly Benevolence myth. A face, furious, imperious—the lips drawn back from the teeth

—a raging face. From that moment on I never thought her "respectable."

"Fool! What do I want but the truth? Why did I send for you? Do not the rats and foxes all about me say smooth things until I loathe them, and every day our wheel axles are deeper in the mud of lies and folly. The truth!—if I have to tear it from your liver!"

I wondered how the blind man would meet this outburst. With fearless dignity—

"Sacred Majesty, it is well. From your supernatural intelligence what else could be looked for? To all great souls truth is venerable. What say the wise? Truth is the hat-pearl of the Superior man. Have I your august permission to see?"

She was smiling, benevolent, urbane, before he had finished speaking. At his command I opened the lacquer box, and drew out a pastille and set it in a little metal stand (all this was done clumsily enough for want of a training in Court crouching. No matter. It suited the part of the Hakka man). My master kowtowed again.

"At this point, Heavenly Empress, I cannot kneel. It is necessary that I recline. May it be pardoned in the presence of Majesty?"

"Lie—sit, anything you will! Only be quick. Those guns should tell you the need of haste."

"The Great Wise Spirits cannot be hastened," he replied gravely. "And haste discomposes me so that I may be an unfitting vehicle."

I could hear her impatient sigh, the only sound that broke the dead silence as the blind man stretched himself

before the step on which her chair was raised, and closed his sightless eyes. Still on my knees I drew near and set the little vessel containing the pastille by his side. The thin blue smoke rose from it about his face. He spoke, in a voice already strange and dim, fading, as it were, into dream.

"Draw back. Let none inhale this smoke but the man who with blinded eyes shall see."

I shuffled back. Dead silence. The women and Li Lien-ying, trained in standing, were rigid as statues. There was not the sound of a breath. My knees ached confoundedly, but the Empress cared nothing but for the white mask before her. And so we remained still, attentive.

Suddenly the lips moved. He spoke Manchu.

"The Spirits of the cold cloud, the Spirits of the black typhoon, the Spirits of war, of blood, of terror, are unloosed. Give me sight, sight, sight! O terrible Spirits! Sight!"

The voice died in a moan. Then as suddenly it broke out again, hoarse, strangled, horrible—a voice I did not know:

"Sight! I see!"

The Empress leaned forward. Etiquette was dead. All stared at the man's working face, and I looked at her as freely as at him and it mattered to no one.

"Sight. I see a room, and it is in the fashion of the foreign devils. A man sits at a table. He writes. Men come in and out with messages. They speak. Can I hear for the guns? O be silent, guns, guns! that I may hear. The Spirits lay their hands across the hot

muzzles of the guns. I hear. 'Another breach in the walls?' 'Yes, another. There are many. This cannot last.'

" 'And the food?'

" 'Little left. The Empress has sent fruits to-day. They are a part of her treachery. Beware lest they be poisoned. That woman is capable of any crime.' "

The Empress's face could not grow more intent, but a kind of white fury flickered over it and passed as she listened to this conversation. What is extraordinary was that it was spoken in two entirely different voices—voices not Chinese, though the words were Manchu, but European. Anyone who has lived in China will know the difference I try to suggest.

" 'No, she will not poison us. The foolish old woman is trying to throw dust in our eyes. She wants to murder us all if she succeeds, and, if she fails, to say to the Powers that she was our friend all through and helpless in the hands of the Boxers. Her diplomacy is childish.'

" 'But can we hold out? Our troops are yet far from Tientsin?'

" 'We can hold out. We shall hold out while two stones stand together of this legation walls.'

" 'And if they come and find us dead?'

" 'Then they will take Peking and the Empress will pay dear for her crimes.'

" 'How?'

" 'By deposition. Possibly death. We shall set the Emperor on his throne again. He understands better than the old woman the power of the Powers. He can learn. She cannot.' "

The Empress uttered a stifled sound. The Empress Consort moved swiftly toward her. In the alarm of the moment I looked up and my eyes met those of the girl behind the chair. They were distended with terror—but blue, blue as living sapphires.

I looked down again, but from that moment my mind was twofold.

" 'We must accept her courtesy as if we believed in it. She must not leave Peking. If she is gone when the troops come, we have lost even if we save our lives. She is throwing dust in our eyes. Throw dust in hers,—anything, anything to keep that woman here when our troops come. China is lost to us if she escapes.' "

She could control herself no longer. I had always heard that she was subject to awful fits of fury. I saw one now. She screamed aloud, she beat her breast with her two hands.

"I have heard enough, enough. Wake him—fool!" She turned on me like a raging lioness. "Can you not wake him? I will hear no more. How could I guess this treachery of the foreign devils? I will see them sliced to death in the streets."

But why record the ravings of a woman, mad for the moment? I shuffled nearer to my master as she raged on. The pastille was dying down into ash, and though his lips moved, still no sound could be heard. Li Lien-ying was looking at her expectant of an order. Heaven knows I thought it would come and would be for our instant death. The Empress Consort addressed her in Manchu.

"Does the slave who attends him know Manchu, Old Buddha?"

"Not a word. We made certain of that. A smattering of Chinese. His own tongue, Hakka."

"Fortunate for him!" said the sinister young woman "There are things a man may not hear and live."

"True. But no fear. Question him, Li Lien-ying. Quick, before his master recovers."

Quick as a flash, Li put a question to me in Manchu.

"Is the sage's life in danger in these trances, disciple of the learned?"

I did not look up. I shook my head stupidly.

"No understand," I said in Chinese—then eagerly:

"Rice wine to wet his lips," purposely making it seem that fear had made me forgetful of the illustrious lookers-on. The attendant left the hall to fetch it, and the Empress Consort said passionately:

"Is it fitting that a man should live who knows these secrets?"

"It is fitting that I should know what he can tell me, my foolish niece," said the Empress. "How else can I stand in the legation and hear their secrets? Afterward—who knows! Let us see what he remembers when he wakes."

I listened to these two pitiless women and my heart was like iron inside me. What is fate that it puts power and the lives of men and women in such hands? Inscrutable, amazing. But for fate this woman might have been a household shrew, scolding at her neighbours. Now she was an empress, playing fast and loose with the

destinies of millions, with the lives of my own countrymen and many another for the pawns in her game, influenced by the atrocious Li Lien-ying and others as worthless. The irony of the gods—their pitiless jesting!

But Li Lien-ying returned with the wine and I wetted my master's lips with it—no more, for I knew he was abstemious as a hermit. He lay like one insensible now—a ghastly pallor. The Empress looked down upon him with eager interest.

"It is perhaps best to send for the Court physician. His life is valuable," she said, but even as she spoke, there was a faint fluttering in the nerves about the eyes—like the wings of a butterfly. A minute or two passed while the Empress Consort whispered with her, and I supported his head. Suddenly the Empress turned to the girl behind the chair.

"Sië, you have the perfumes that the Russian emperor sent us last year. Bring some." She slid off with the graceful, smooth motion of a flying swallow, scarcely seeming to move her feet, but going swiftly, and returned with a costly little European scent bottle, gold stoppers set with rubies, and held it out.

"Open it. Apply it to his nostrils. Kneel down. Are you proud? Remember whence I raised you," said the Empress impatiently; and the girl, blushing scarlet, came and knelt at my master's other side, and with a dainty hand unscrewed the stopper and held it to his nostrils. It was strong lavender water, and the unexpected cottage smell was so strange in that strange place that it almost went to my head. But what— On the little hand that held it was a jade ring—a ring of most precious jewel

jade, and veining it a rose-coloured streak. I caught my breath. My back was to the Empress as I supported my master, and I could and did look as I would. For now I knew. She was an elfin beauty, small, exquisitely shaped, full of spirit, her eyes all fire and dew. Manchu, yes! But exotic, for the dominant European blood fired the passive Oriental and proclaimed itself in the firmly closed crimson lips, the delicate projection of the little chin, the straight small nose. The eyes were lovely, veiled in long Oriental lashes—never are such seen in the West. The hair— But my chance was over. I dared look no more, the blind man was moving more consciously.

In a few minutes he struggled into a sitting posture, and the girl flew back to her position behind the chair, dropping the bottle. I picked it up, and as she came forward again to receive it our eyes met in a flash.

Did anything else pass between them? I thought it did.

The blind man sat erect now, the sweat beaded on his forehead, and passed his hand feebly over his dead eyes; then feebly whispered: "Yuan!"

"Here, my honoured master," I said, still supporting him.

"Where am I? But now I was in a strange place. Have I returned?"

"You have returned, Excellent Wisdom."

"Have I spoken? What have I said?"

I was beginning to answer, but here the Empress took a hand in the game.

"It is the Auspicious Mother who speaks, wise Blind

One. Yes, you have spoken but words difficult to decipher. Much more is needed. Have you no memory of your sight?"

"None, none. Has it served your Majesty?"

He had got on his knees now, feebly, swaying. I still supported him, kneeling myself.

"We hope for much more from your wisdom. Still, all things must have a beginning. Take this as a reward. Much greater shall follow faithful service."

She signed to Sië, who again came forward and placed a small casket in my hand. Again the Empress questioned:

"You recall nothing?"

"Alas, Maternal Benevolence, I cannot, for when the sight went memory went with it. Where was I? Knowing that, memory might return."

"In the besieged legation," the Empress answered with extreme caution. Then added cunningly: "Ask your man. He perhaps could understand more."

But, weak as he was, the blind man saw her drift. He questioned me, but in Hakka, which none of them understood. I answered respectfully. No, not a word could I tell. He had spoken in some unknown tongue.

He repeated my reply, and continued:

"Dares a slave of the humblest ask the Sublime Empress in what tongue this ignorant person spoke?"

"Manchu," she answered briefly. "And now, wise blind man, depart until we summon you, and use your leisure in working out my horoscope once more, for well I remember your skill in that great art. It was unequalled and the fools who have since worked it were

unworthy to present your shoe for wearing. Sië, offer the last horoscope drawn to the attendant."

Again she came forward, with a paper in her hand. Our eyes met again. I contrived that they should. Adroitly, as I thought, I had shifted the collar of my robelike coat, where just out of sight lay the jade dragon which I always wore. Now it was visible. Would it catch her eye; would any vibration strike from it that might make a line of communication?

She made no sign whatever, but unluckily sharper eyes than hers had caught the green gleam at my throat. Li Lien-ying. He made a quick sign to the Empress.

"What is that?" she called imperiously in Chinese. "The imperial dragon in precious jade! Take it from him, Li Lien-ying, and show it to me. Does he understand my words, blind man?"

"Undoubtedly, your Majesty, but his speaking is not courtly. Detach the ornament, my disciple. Your sovereign would see it."

Quaking very literally, I unknotted the slender cord passed through the ring. It was not that I feared the Empress at the moment, but I feared above all things losing my clue. I feared that the sight of this unusual and beautiful jewel might bring undesirable knowledge to others—those whose interference I least desired.

Li Lien-ying took the dragon and rubbed it clean from the least defilement of my person on the silk of his robe, and then presented it without ceremony to the Empress. It was well known he could take liberties with the Old Buddha on which no one else dare venture.

She looked at it steadily as it lay in her hand, for a moment in dead silence. The Empress Consort leaned over her with intense curiosity. Li Lien-ying bent his gross body over the back of her chair. My brain was working furiously, concocting an answer for the question I knew would come. Fool—fool that I had been! I dared a glance at Sië. She was rigid, her eyes fixed on the ground.

At last the Empress spoke.

"This is a most wonderful ornament. It is the five-clawed imperial dragon, given only by imperial favour, for on the back appear the characters "Honor" and "Longevity," and the mark of his venerated Majesty, the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. And its beauty is enhanced by the rose-red streak running through the wings. There is not its like in the Middle Kingdom. How should an obscure person, forced for his living to be the attendant of a blind man, carry an imperial jewel?"

I gave myself up for lost.

"Question him, Old Buddha," said Li Lien-ying. She turned her eyes like daggers on me.

"How did you get it? Where?"

The blind man was kneeling before her still, I also on my knees.

I answered without a pause, but slowly and in Chinese without any of the graces which should be presented at the throne.

"Your slave was walking by night two years since in the Woodpecker Lane in a village in the prefecture of Ka-ying-chow, and his ignoble foot struck this thing. Since then, for none claimed it, this ignorant person has

kept it, thinking that in a day of need it might sell for twenty taels of silver and so preserve his unworthy life. If he has done wrong he entreats mercy."

"That story is false!" she said angrily. "Imperial jewel jade does not lie about the lanes of miserable villages."

The blind man ventured a word, abasing his head against the ground:

"Motherly Benevolence, this story was told me by the disciple when first he began to serve me."

She was about to speak, then checked herself and said no more. Having received our orders to depart, we both kowtowed and on our knees retreated backward along the hall, presenting an appearance unspeakably absurd, if I could have given it a thought, but so alarmed was I at the moment, so furious with myself for having lost my most important clue, that if we had been walking on our heads I doubt whether I should have realized it. Of course she kept the dragon. It was the more maddening, because when we got back to our rooms I dared not utter a word to the blind man on the subject, yet it was burning like fire between my lips.

He had come gallantly to the rescue, but I would have given half I am worth in the world to learn his opinion of what had taken place. Not only so, but I craved to know if his vision was true or false. To be surrounded by mysteries, to be unable to speak to one's only friend —I was half frantic with eagerness, yet dared say nothing.

When we were alone I opened the little casket Sië had put in my hand and it contained, as I expected, my

master's fee—a single pearl, not large, but of a perfect shape and water. There is no royal family in the world which owns such pearls as that of China. I described it to him, but he scarcely listened:

"Her sacred Majesty is bountiful. Put it away, my disciple; these things are the toys of children!" he said, and, sitting by the window, composed himself to meditation. I envied him that power of perfect abstraction which is known to all the Orient, but of which the headlong West knows nothing. It is to the mind what sleep is to the body.

Dinner was served by Fox-face and a young servant who looked simple and good-natured, the only person I had seen in the palace of whom I could have said that. But how could better be expected in that vast hive of shameful secrets, plottings and cruelties?

It was an excellent dinner. I remember that among other good things we had a favourite dish of the Old Buddha's, "tangwo kuo," or "fruits lying in gravy," i.e., eggs poached in chicken gravy. We had also clotted cream flavoured with apricot, and if the courses were a little tangled according to European notions, that did not trouble me. But I must own that in that forbidding place with a hum of unseen and vicious life going on mysteriously about one, I was inclined to wonder whether some day the fruits in gravy might not be seasoned with something less obvious than salt, and our exit from the palace be made feet foremost! And of all these delicacies the blind man touched nothing but rice and fruit and vegetables. Neither before nor afterward did I ever see him break that stern rule. I learned his reason later.

The moon had risen, and her pale glory transfigured the garden into a scene of unearthly beauty. Two trees of a kind I had never seen stood before our windows, tossing fountains of perfumed rose bloom upward. Scarcely a leaf could be seen for the lavish splendour of blossom, and the hot night air of June was quivering with the almost intolerable sweetness. It called through the open window. I could stand it no longer.

"Revered master, you need repose after the great honour done you this day, but for me, having your gracious permission, I would taste the fresh air. Is it permitted that I go into the garden?"

"My disciple, it is permitted. Return for me in a while and you shall lead me to the water that I may inhale its coolness, when I have refreshed my soul."

Seated, he began to recite the Lotus Gospel in a soft monotone, and, standing under the trees, I listened awhile. It tranquillized my thoughts after all the feverish agitations of the day.

> "I, the World-Honored,
> Speak the words of truth,
> And wheresoever the Living Word is spoken
> Becomes my shrine,
> And being heard
> By the assembly,
> They chant Holy, Holy!"—

The hour was infinitely sweet and peaceful. In the moonlight the crimson of the blossomed trees had faded into ashes of roses—almost grey. The world was closing its eyes, for sleep, colour and light were drowsing, and

the quiet voice within intoned the pure words of the Gospel of Asia like a lullaby. For a moment I almost forgot the wicked palace and the sinister lights that shone from its windows illuminating who knows what counsels of deceit and cruelty.

As I stood there, not thinking, but bathing a weary mind and body in the wells of stillness, a light footfall came softly between the two great bronze cranes by the edge of the little lake. A woman. My senses sprang to swift attention. She walked straight toward me, unshrinking. I could scarcely believe my eyes for a moment. And yet, with a swift flash of thought I remembered that the Empress was accused not only of permitting but encouraging tremendous departures from ancestral customs in her ladies. Some of them went out into the city on her secret errands, in sedan chairs, it is true, but openly. The Royal lady known as "the Eighth Married Sister" was everywhere in Peking, at race meetings, restaurants and bazaars and stores. Without an escort, with only a lady in attendance, this enterprising young person went where she would, almost with the freedom of a European. And Peking, not to mention Canton, thrilled to far more important scandals of the palace than these. Still, in the moonlight and alone, with some filmy stuff thrown over her head and face, it was certainly startling to see a Palace lady approaching with steady assurance.

She made the usual salutation, bowing and raising her crossed hands, and unhesitatingly opened the business, in a voice so sweet and low that it harmonized with the quiet of the night like dimly heard music.

"Honourable person, I come with a message from her sacred Majesty."

I kowtowed as in duty bound. Had it been an imperial rescript I must have prostrated myself. I did not speak. It was the part of an inferior to await the command.

"Her Majesty has heard disquieting news. It is represented to her that warships are about to land strong large foreign forces to march from Tientsin upon Peking. She desires the illumined sage to perform such rites as will unfold the truth, and in an hour this unworthy person will return to receive his knowledge and lay it before the throne."

She turned as if to go. Humbly bowing, I desired her to do us the honour to delay one instant, that I might speak with my master. She bowed in silence and, entering the room, I interrupted the recitation to tell him in Chinese the favour that had befallen him.

He touched my foot twice with his and replied aloud:

"Inform the great lady who confers this honour upon us that this lowly person will send his soul to search the knowledge required by the Divine Empress. His ignorance, however, demands two hours for research."

I knew that the double pressure on my foot meant "'Ware spies," and remembered that the Empress, following the kindred example of Catherine di Medici in the sixteenth century, was said to employ some of her most beautiful ladies as spies to worm out the secrets she suspected. I touched his hand as if accidentally, and returned with his message to where the unknown stood in the shadow of the trees. She had put back the silk

covering from her face pale in the moonlight and I saw what some intuition had whispered to me—it was Sië. Yet even then I was so startled that I did an incredibly foolish thing. The spy business went out of my head as if I had never heard it. I forgot every warning, every caution—and gave the message in my best Chinese, very unlike the clumsiness I had displayed in the Imperial Presence, and never noticed what I was doing till too late. She bowed, but lingered, poised on one little foot as she turned. Not a crippled one. The Manchu women have never bound their feet, and there was not one to be found in the precincts of the Forbidden City. Then again she spoke.

"Noble person, I have a question to ask." (I bowed again.) "In the presence of her Majesty you displayed a dragon of jade, with a rose veining in the wings and bearing the mark of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. That dragon belonged to my great-great-grandmother. It was given to her father by the Emperor and—"

I interrupted, a discourtesy unheard of in China, but those who read will excuse me even as did Sië.

"I know, lady. She was a foreigner. She was English. Her name was Dorothy Keith."

"It is true—true," she said in a low eager voice. "I cannot say her name, but it is true. And she and her husband were lost and with them the dragon of the Emperor. How comes it that you possessed it?"

"Lady, it is a strange story and a long one. But I am of your great-great-grandfather's family. My name is John Mallerdean."

She stood staring at me in the moonlight, white as

death with the shock of surprise. It was then I remembered that I had behaved like a criminal lunatic. I had given the whole show away, my master's as well as my own, to one of the Empress's ladies. It was too late. I could not deny what I had said. We were at the mercy of a stranger woman.

"Then why, why are you here?" she asked in a gasp.

"To seek for you. You and I are of the same blood. I know of wealth that is yours, of friends who would welcome you. And now that I have told you the truth, you can give me to death if you will. But I am your cousin, far off indeed, but still your cousin."

"To death?" she said slowly. "No, indeed. You are the only one of my blood left alive. My father was executed by the Empress. My mother committed suicide. I have no brother. A cousin is as a brother. My lips are shut. But now I dare not stay. That indeed would be death for us both. Distrust all around you. We shall meet again."

She was gone, flitting away between the bronze cranes. The whole amazing episode had taken possibly three minutes. But it had changed my whole outlook for all that. I was not sorry—I was glad I had told her. So that was she—blue-eyed, black-haired, beautiful, a girl with more than a grain of her ancestor's courage and resolution! The Manchu is a stronger stock than the Chinese, at all events as far as the women go; but there was also John Mallerdean behind that firmness and courage, or I was much mistaken. I remembered how in my master's vision she had confronted the Empress, and I was proud of this strange offshoot of the family tree.

But should I tell my master? With all these thoughts dancing in my brain I went in and found him waiting for me.

"Lead me out, my disciple, into the quiet of the night. Even to my blinded eyes there is a difference between the glare of the sun and the soft darkness. And I must refresh myself before I undertake this new task for the sacred Empress. My old brain is weary."

I led him out slowly, and to the marble edge of the little lake whence rose a divine coolness. The moon swam in it like a goldfish with a ripple of golden scales. Not a sound, not a step in the garden. It was an Eden of quiet and behind us the wicked lights of the palace. Certainly it was an hour for silence and meditation, but for me life was too urgent. I knew it would be impossible for me to keep the thing from his perfect trustfulness, and I told him exactly what had happened, expecting a severe rebuke at the least, possibly instant dismissal. I spoke in Hakka and scarcely above my breath. No rebuke came.

"My disciple, you should have consulted me; but yet —I know not. Fate is leading you down the appointed ways, and what is my ignorance that it should intrude? And also it is to be seen that this lady has the courage of the women of your race. It may be that it is well for my purpose as for yours that this has happened, and in any case what is done is done and we must abide it."

There was no more to be said. I ventured, standing as we were in the middle of the garden, to ask whether he had remembered any of his "sight" for the Empress,

and when he replied that he remembered nothing, at his request I told him what had passed.

"Let nothing escape you, my disciple," he said earnestly. "Note it all. It is certainly by the favour of the Blessed One that we have been given this garden, for here we may exchange a few words in safety, which is more than I dared to hope. Now let us not speak for ten minutes, that I may compose my thoughts and bathe them in pure air, and then I will send my soul in search of the truth."

If it appear strange that I never questioned the honesty of his visions, let it be remembered that I had myself experienced the wonder of his story of Yang Lien's interview with the Empress. But far and away beyond that were the man's own transparent honesty and goodness. I could no more have disbelieved a word he said to me than I could have doubted my own father's assertion. But a strange thing indeed was in store for me that strange night. I will come to it presently.

As we walked slowly up and down in the moonlight I asked him the question that was always in my mind. *How* are these strange things done in the Orient which in the West are called fraud, spiritualism, or occultism? I had seen them myself in past years, things inexplicable on any theory that I could form. Fraud, of course, one meets in the Orient as elsewhere, but beyond and above it lies a whole world of happenings. The people take these things as natural. They see no miracle in them. They accept them and pass on. Is this ignorant credulity or is it instinctive knowledge?

He seated himself by the water, and his face assumed that *inward* expression I knew by this time.

"My disciple, it is fitting that you should ask and I answer. The West does not, cannot understand, for it has sat at the feet of another Teacher, and even His counsels it despises. But your men of science have of late made the discovery which has been our daily bread for ages. They teach now that within every man and woman there is a second self—a strange self which forgets nothing, which can act upon the body and constrain it to health or disease according to its own will. Convince this inner self in a man that he is dying, and he will die. Convince it that health awaits him, and he will recover. This inner self is wiser than the outer, and yet in some ways more foolish. What is it? Your wise men cannot tell. We know."

The Empress's attendant, Li Lien-ying, passed taking the air as we were. He strolled within hearing distance. I caught the glint of his eye as it keenly observed us. I touched my master's foot twice. He slightly raised his voice, and the gross man stayed his feet to listen to this unearthly wisdom. A strange auditor.

"My disciple, we know that each man has not one life but many lives, and that he passes up all the stair of existences until he gains the highest. From each life he carries to the next the spark of the Immortal, and also *experience*. What use, you will ask, is experience if memory is not with it? It is latent, my disciple. In every man's heart it lies passive, waiting the call. And when a man learns how to wake and control that inner self he can do signs and wonders, for this aggregated

experience and imagination is the inner self newly discovered in the West, and we long ago discovered it as the pearl in the oyster, and clasped its hand, and so have done marvels. The spirits do not return, they have gone forward to their next lesson in life. There is nothing supernatural, all is law. But within every human body is power, layer below layer of experience and knowledge, and this is allied with the highest and the lowest, and when a man has gained this power he can do mighty deeds for good and evil."

Li Lien-ying had drawn nearer. His coarse face was alight with curiosity now.

"Good and evil, illuminated sage?" he said. "Can a man make others do his will? Can he attain great riches? If so, inform this ignoble person how the secret may be attained!"

The Blind Man of Hupei knew the voice, and felt the devil behind it, but he replied with serene composure:

"This secret can be attained by self-mastery whether for good or ill, by discipline, by self-denial. Not in this life—not in this, oh, powerful person, shall you handle that power! The day will come, but is far off."

Li Lien-ying scowled, and passed on, passing and repassing slowly.

"But you, my disciple, can learn this secret, for the power is in you. Your inner and outer selves shall clasp hands, and you will walk illuminated and know that 'miracles' are easy to be wrought, but are nothing—so great is what lies beyond them."

He relapsed into a tranquil silence which I would not disturb. I had glimpses then, but his words came true.

I have learned that secret. My blind eyes are opened. After a while I led him back to the room. He looked pale and exhausted.

"To-night I can see no more," he said, "I am weary. See for me, my disciple."

I started back.

"I see? How can I? My master, I know nothing."

"See for me," he repeated. "Place yourself before me and I will give you sight."

I own I was greatly alarmed, but it never entered into my head to disobey. Every hour the quiet power, calm and certainty of that man strengthened on me. So I can imagine the great Oriental sages of the past, impregnable in inner wisdom. His blindness mattered nothing to him —I think it had even been a gain, so lucid, so untroubled was the true vision.

So I sat before him obedient, and he said:

"Look steadily at the crystal ball in my right hand. Think of nothing but that. Relax your reason. You have none. You are as a little child who sleeps in its mother's arms and draws unconscious life from the contact. Be silent. Look! And, till I bid you forget, remember!"

I fixed my eyes on a small crystal ball in his hand. The light swam in it. It invaded my brain. It grew, it was larger, brighter, almost unbearably brilliant, like a sun, then suddenly it broke up into a thousand dancing stars, and I heard a loud command.

"I loose you! Go!"—and black darkness followed.

Darkness and utter calm. Then a tiny bright picture

painted on it very far off like a scene through the reversed end of a telescope. A strange picture. Men marching, marching, in seemingly endless files. It enlarged as they came toward me exactly like a picture in the movies. They tramped steadily on, dusty, grimy, but relentless—Europe on her way to try conclusions with Asia. Not all European, though, for I saw the files of Japanese soldiers, short, sturdy, unflinching in their stolid calm as I had often seen them on my holiday rambles in Japan. Asia divided against herself, but if ever she marches as one man, let Europe stand from under!

Where were they facing? Toward the Nei Cheng, the Tartar city of Peking, the mighty walls frowning down their approach.

I could almost fancy I heard the measured thud of their stride, all was so real and clear.

Now, a thing impossible in real life, I saw the great walls dissolve, as it were, before them. They fluttered like scenery cloths in a theatre, and the marching men passed through their sixty-feet bulk as if they were morning mist. The purple, vermilion, orange scrollwork on the pagoda above the high archway faded like sunrise glories. The men tramped through as if they did not know they were there. They modernized with their stern military presence the overpowering antiquity of this marvellous city where men have gathered for twelve hundred years before Christ. They swept on. They made for Canal Street where stands the British Legation walled and guarded. The gates were flung open. I

saw the English flag waving, the tumult of many people rejoicing; women and children running to meet the troops and then—darkness!

Darkness swallowed it up. I saw no more.

Was I asleep or dead? Then from the darkness, another picture shaped, small and gemlike at first, but enlarging like the other. Grey dawn. A gate of the imperial palace unknown to me, but which mysteriously I knew to be the Gate of Military Prowess. No military prowess about it now. Two country carts. A man and a woman with others about them, the man, young, pallid, ill-fed looking, in a robe of black; the woman elderly and in the common blue dress of a peasant woman, her hair dressed Chinese fashion. But what should a Chinese woman be doing in the palace of the foreign rulers? Chinese she was, however, her hair dressed peasant fashion, her brows black with fury. I knew her, I knew her—the Empress! Li Lien-ying was beside her. She flung out her hand with a furious gesture at a beautiful pale woman standing by the Emperor, and as I saw Li Lien-ying grasp her shoulder, the picture was gone. Gone like a dream.

In the terror of it I started up like one suddenly roused from sleep, mazed, but remembering perfectly.

"I have been asleep," I said; "the most vivid dream I ever had in my life. The Empress—"

The blind man put his finger on his lip and I stopped dead.

"Write," he said. "Write quickly while it is fresh. It fades like morning dew. In ten minutes you will remember nothing. Write."

He pushed an ink brush and slab to me and I wrote

swiftly. Then, by his desire, I led him into the garden and read what I had written. He bid me tear off the last paragraph and tear it into minutest bits. Half he gave me, half he kept, and—we swallowed them! Being summer, there was no brazier at hand.

Then on another paper, ornamented to meet the eye of royalty, I wrote at his dictation an account of the first vision. Of the second only this was written: "Confused tumult at the Gate of Military Prowess. Unworthy persons of the lower class apparently gain admittance."

CHAPTER VI

IT is a fact that when I went out into the garden again by his order I could remember neither having slept nor dreamed. I remembered what I had written, and I knew he said I had seen it, but I had no personal memory that this was true. And yet, whether it was the strange experience I had passed through, I cannot tell, but I felt more clear, more lucid, than I had ever done before. It seemed that every sense was sharpened and I might hear and see at incredible distances. No doubt some weird stimulation of the brain by the contact of the blind man's powerful mind, but ecstatic at the moment. Hot wafts of perfume from the living, tossing fountains of rose bloom, intoxicated me like strong wine. Delicious, heavenly! Never flowers smelt like that before. I bent my head among the crowded blossoms of the lower boughs to drink it into my very being. I swallowed it, breathed it, put my arm about the trunk to draw it nearer in all its divine odour and beauty. If beauty struck always at the naked nerve like that, how should we endure the glory of the world about us?

It was not long before she came. Her loveliness, too, was enhanced beyond expression to my new perception. When she glided under the trees it almost seemed that the moonlight played like harmless fire about her sweet shape, and a kind of glory glittered from her eyes—so

fair, so delicately beautiful, was she in the dappled ivory and ebony of moonlight and shadow. Moving softly, she shed enticements as she came. Again I say, if beauty shot always such darts of enchantment, how should man endure it?

On she came with her lovely salutation of crossed hands as she bowed, and stood beside me.

"Is the work completed for her auspicious Majesty, noble person?"

"Lady, it is done."

I could scarcely speak for looking at this lovely daughter of the night and stars.

"Is it your will that I take it?" she hesitated.

I stretched out my hand with the paper. I could not speak. The silence was intense, for the guns had ceased and the night was still as though on tiptoe, with parted lips, it were listening for what I would say. The moon, the girl's sweetness, my own exaltation dragged me across the line of reticence for better or for worse. I caught her hand, and though she shrank back to the length of my arm I held her fast.

"My cousin, I must see you in some place where we can speak in safety. There is much, much that I must hear and tell you. Tell me when and where."

No matter how distant, relationship is sacred in China and in calling her "cousin" I traded on that.

Shrinking, her eyes still faced mine bravely.

"Noble person—my cousin," (then she accepted our tie!) "I cannot say certainly where, but I must see you and soon."

We stood handclasped, looking into each other's eyes.

"The Old Buddha has kept the jade dragon. She sent for the Inventory of Treasure and found it listed among the possessions of Ho Shen, that rich man who served the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. A list was made of all his treasures and they were confiscated to the Emperor who succeeded the mighty Ch'ien Lung, and Ho was commanded to commit suicide. But when they claimed his riches much had disappeared and this dragon with it. And now the Empress, with Li Lien-ying, says this dragon is a clue to the lost treasure, and if they can find the truth of how you, my cousin, became possessed of it they may secure it all. Oh, fly, I beseech you, while there is time. Not even the wisdom of the blind man can save you if they believe you know this secret. Fly!"

She pulled at her little hand as a bird flutters its wings when captured, but I held her fast.

"My cousin, I will not fly. I also have the sight. I am powerful. Tell me quickly, what was Ho to you?"

"His son married my ancestress, the daughter of John Mallerdean, the favoured of the Emperor and Ho. And since that we have been in high Court favour until with this Empress my people fell into disgrace; but me she keeps with her always and I cannot tell why."

I released her hand. My brain steadied. The news was so vital, the danger so great, that it sobered me like the dash of cold water. Instantly I guessed how things would be. They would tempt me to reveal my secret, using Sië for the purpose. That was why she was here now—had not the blind man warned me? In ordinary circumstances to approach a Court lady would be as impossible as to scale the heights to a star, but now

my heart rejoiced, all was well. We could meet in peace. I saw a wide road opening before me.

Though I had released her, womanlike she lingered then.

"My cousin," she said in a voice soft as murmuring water; "I must tell you the shameful truth, and then indeed you will leave me for ever. The Empress has laid her command on me to gain your trust and tempt the truth from you, that you may reveal to me where lies the treasure of Ho. And now I have told this hateful thing, let me go. But remember that if I seem to seek your presence it is not the forwardness of a shameless woman, but to save your life and mine. For if I refuse they will send another in my place and you are doomed; but together we may consider and escape. And yet this is not likely, for very terrible is the Empress, and Li Lien-ying more terrible still."

I needed no assurance of her transparent truth, for who could doubt those clear eyes of Western blue, but here was assurance. I clasped her hand again.

"My cousin," I said earnestly, "this is better than good, for now we can meet and I can tell you my story. Feign to the Empress that you obey."

She made a mute sign, her quick wit grasping the situation—

"Let me go now—now, this instant," she whispered, terrified, next minute.

I looked round. Down the marble pavement a gross figure loomed large in the moonlight—Li Lien-ying.

"No, no! Seem to speak to me earnestly," I whispered. The gallant little soul! She did it though

I could see the quivering of the nerves about her mouth. In the faintest whisper she said:

"That man—that man, he is a fiend. His passion for gold and jewels is deep as the sea. Oh, my cousin, he and the Empress are terrible. My days are days of fear. Oh, that I might die and be at peace, lying in the ancestral tombs with the friends who were good to me! My life is a heavy burden."

Very easily might her earnestness be set down to another cause as she lifted a pleading face to mine. I whispered back:

"I will save you, my cousin. Fear not. Now go. Make a signal of confidence to that devil as you pass him. Again—fear not. Deliverance is near."

I stood alone under the tree. She was gone like a spirit. I saw her passing swiftly up the path. I saw the smile the brave girl cast on Li Lien-ying, and then she rounded a corner and was gone like a lost star. My cousin had already a value and interest to me that I scarcely understood, though pity goes deep and the hardest heart might have pitied a girl in such hands.

He came up to me fawning, an adept in ingratiation.

"Was the sight favourable to the illumined sage, wise disciple?"

"The sight was mine, favoured attendant of royal persons," I replied. "My great master was too wearied to attempt a flight with the spirits, therefore he sent this contemptible person instead, and the Great Wise Spirits were favourable, and I saw."

"I knew not that you also possessed this magic. May this worm ask what was seen?"

"Revered one, all information is open to the guardian of the inner chambers, but I cannot tell, for it is the peculiarity of this sight that it is forgotten on returning to the world of men. My master, however, noted my poor utterances, such as they were, and the Auspicious Empress has them by the hand of yonder lady."

"Ay, ay. I have heard this sight is hard to recall," he said, accepting my statement easily. "She is beautiful, that lady! She is a darling of the Empress's approaching age."

I bowed in respectful silence.

"Her parentage is great," he pursued carelessly. "Her influence with the Old Buddha is also great. The man to whom that beauty is acceptable will certainly be highly favoured by the Motherly Countenance."

"That fortunate person will have reason to thank his auspicious stars," I returned. "But the favour of the Empress, together with such beauty as this lady's, is a load of good fortune beyond the hope of any but the great and powerful."

"Those who possess the favour of the Great Wise Spirits are both." His face was a mask of humility with a glint of fire in the half-shut eye that lit it. I never saw a face I liked less and never shall. "May I ask," he went on, "if the august person to whom I speak is of the high birth that his distinguished appearance suggests?"

"My birth is scarcely more than respectable, but my education is good and I write and compose in Mandarin like a literate, though unluckily a want of experience in the colloquial makes my speech disagreeable in the ears of the condescending person I address."

"Not at all, not at all! It is jewelled with eloquence and modesty," he said with the politest insincerity. Then, changing the subject: "To a man of your prominent merit I cannot be wrong in saying that the position of public affairs is very grave and is moreover hampered by the emptiness of the treasury, the Old Buddha's inexhaustible charity to her subjects having reduced her purse even below the limits of wisdom. It is vain to attempt to check the maternal impulses, though this unworthy one has done his best."

This was pretty well! In common with every educated person in China I knew of the vast sums spent on the Empress's pleasures, on the summer palace, on other indulgences less reputable. I knew well that the creature before me had feathered his nest to the tune of millions —I knew much more, but I took it all with unctuous gravity.

"Is it not said by the sage of sages, 'Behave with generosity in order to illustrate harmony and benignity'? Her Majesty's reward will be universal affection and a peaceful longevity."

"Doubtless. Yet it is very inconvenient at the moment when the Old Buddha has anxieties and expenditure beyond the common. The man who could through his communion with the Great Wise Spirits or in any other way put her in the track of augmenting her resources just now would receive rewards beyond the dreams of fairies."

"Fortunate indeed would be that man!" said I with pious warmth. He drew a little nearer.

"Your master, learned disciple; is it true that his

powers are so great? Could anything of a solid nature be hoped from him?"

The man was as superstitious as he was dangerous. I met him in his own vein, with a confidential tone and eye.

"Does your Excellency recall the great Emperor Wu? If so, you will recall how Li Shao Kun declared in his presence: 'I know how to harden snow and change it into white silver. I know how cinnabar transforms its nature and passes into yellow gold. I can rein the flying dragon and visit the extremities of the earth; I can bestride the hoary crane and soar above the nine degrees of heaven!' This he said and this he did and so became the trusted adviser of the Emperor, and such and no other are the powers of my master."

"Marvellous! Marvellous!" he said with greedy pleasure. "The virtues of the just are ever blessed with prosperity. I thank you, wise disciple, and in return for these sprinklings of wisdom I beseech you not to close your own eyes to your stupendous possibilities of advancement."

We parted with elaborate courtesies. He went up the marble steps at the end of the garden with the light and soundless tread so often seen in very stout people, and I returned indoors still with that strange illumination upon me. I felt that I had been able to see every tortuous winding of his brain. Sië was to be loosed upon me for the finding of the treasure, and a simple Hakka gentleman was likely indeed to be beguiled by a Court beauty. They never suspected that John Mallerdean was before them, a man in whose veins ran kindred blood to the Empress's favourite. If they ever guessed

that—for me, six inches of cold steel; for Sië, a pinch of the Empress's famous pink powder warranted to insure dreamless sleep. It might be so yet; but at present I was playing them, not they me.

I longed to communicate all this to my master, but it was late and the day had been too full of storm and stress. We both needed rest. When I entered he was peacefully reciting some lines of the Lotus Scripture:

> "These men who believe,
> Have knowledge deep,
> Strong-hearted, swift to follow
> The wisdom of the illumined.
> All wisdom rare and precious
> Is theirs—"

I stood a while listening. *What* wisdom, *what* forces were at this wise man's disposal? I would ask him, and in truth be his disciple. There was much in him that entirely passed my understanding.

Then, intruding on his quiet ecstasy, I begged him to sleep, saying, for I knew it would be the best argument, how sorely I myself needed rest. He rose at once and I did all the little services his blindness needed, and very soon the rooms were dark and quiet and we slept. Did cruel stealthy eyes watch us even in sleep? It might well be.

I rose refreshed in the early dawn, and still that same keenness of inward vision was upon me. I have since learned that this is often a result of being "sent on the quest" as they call it, by an adept possessing "the high wisdom." For there is a high wisdom and a low in what

the world is pleased to call "magic" and the one uplifts and exalts while the other degrades and enervates.

I strolled up and down by the little lake while my master performed his morning devotions.

The story was gradually clearing up from all the misstatements. Ho's wealth was rightfully his, earned in the service of the greatest Emperor of the Manchu dynasty. That Emperor's unworthy son and successor had obliged him to suicide that he might seize his treasure—an old story in Oriental courts where it is a frightful danger to be rich. Partly foreseeing his miserable end, Ho had (through John Mallerdean) secured a few crumbs of it in the Temple of the August Peace. A few crumbs to him whose personal fortune at his death was estimated roughly by the imperial authorities at a sum represented by seventy millions *sterling* and later, when the calculations were concluded, at almost double that amount. I could not form any estimate of how much was concealed in the temple, but it was clear as noonday to me now that there must be considerably more than the priest had shown me. Very likely he knew of no more. Such a detail as that would be likely to escape "the august vision," as his curious way of preserving historical information is called by adepts. The Keith share in the matter was becoming clear too. It seemed extremely probable that John Mallerdean's father-in-law, Colonel Keith, was also an agent of Ho and was aiding his son-in-law to transfer the treasure by different means and times to a place of safety. How little he could have foreseen that a descendant of his daughter Dorothy would be the sole claimant of the treasure he was help-

ing to hide! An important question was whether the Temple of the August Peace was the only place they had chosen for concealment. That all the precious eggs would be in one basket did not strike me as probable where such men as John Mallerdean and Ho himself were concerned. But where? China is a wide field of search.

Be that as it might, Sië was the true heiress to her ancestor's estate—the poor survival of what had been swept into the imperial coffers. Mine it could never be. It was hers, and if strength and insight were given me she should not only have it, but be released from the hateful slavery of the Court and the domination of the Empress and Li Lien-ying. So far all was clear. But one thing as yet I failed to understand—why the Empress who had shown herself so merciless to the family should show favour to this one sad remnant of their fallen fortunes. Why did she keep Sië about her? Perhaps she herself might throw light on this doubtful point. There was another thing—why and how had the blind man been moved by the mention of the name of John Mallerdean?

All that day the guns boomed on the tortured legation. Dreadful stories circulated of the miseries endured within the slender defence of the walls. The cries of the native Christians, cruelly slaughtered in the streets, at times pierced even the tranquillity of the Empress's gardens. And many were done to death who had never "eaten the new religion." The Palace attendants admitted as much. Fox-face, with a careless gesture, observed to my master, "When the fire rages common pebble and precious jade

will be consumed together." But this seemed to trouble no one. All must take their chance.

We spent most of the day under the willows by the lake working out the Old Buddha's horoscope. These occult matters have always interested me, and I had taken them up as a secondary interest to my hobby of the early Korean potteries, so that I was not only able to follow intelligently, but also to be of real service to my blind master in working out the scheme. I may as well own at once that taking the data universal in China, the coincidence of the planetary influences with the history of that amazing woman was perfectly astonishing.

They gave her all the courage of a man and more than the ordinary man's intelligence. They traced her from her lowly beginning to the dizzy heights she had reached. They did not spare her private character, but showed influences at work there which an Oriental ruler, whether man or woman, was unlikely to resist, and report spoke in every corner of the Empire of the results. They revealed the hidden springs of character which had made her the merciless tyrant of the unhappy Emperor who was now scarcely even a figurehead. If I had been working the horoscope in utter ignorance of whose I had in hand, this still must have been the result. Strange!

And then, having completed the past, we came to the starry auguries for the future.

"Here," said the blind man, in Hakka, "we must perceive with perfect vision, but express ourselves with the utmost caution. Work out, disciple, under my instruction the ephemera of the following eight years, for I have

had reason to suppose—" he paused, and I saw his meaning and set myself to the calculations. They were elaborate, for we had also to consider the Emperor's horoscope and that of the Empress Consort to elucidate the Empress's.

After I had finished he sat considering. The facts were consecutive. First, the Boxer business would collapse, dragging the dynasty to fearful peril and to flight from Peking. Second, she would "lose face" before the Allies and be compelled to make reparation for the siege of the legations. Third, the life of the Emperor was bound up with her own. She would die on the day following his death. Fourth, the present Empress Consort, then acting as regent, would complete the ruin of the Manchu dynasty. Fifth, the Empress would "recover face" and prestige with the Allies by her cunning, and her power would endure until her death. Sixth, her life and that of the Emperor would last but eight years longer.

He sat considering a while, and then said:

"Put all this in writing, omitting entirely the fourth and sixth clauses. These remain secret between you and me. The last I have known many years for my fate and hers coincide. Power was inevitable for us both, born under the same aspects, but hers has been of this world and mine of another. The impulses which have borne fruit of disaster were in me as in the Old Buddha, but I was exposed to an influence which bestowed on me the upward-looking vision which she has not. Great and wonderful are the mysteries of the heavens and the fettered hands of man."

I ventured to say it seemed incredible that the far distant and unconcerned planets should influence the lot of human beings, and added some facts of modern science which cast ridicule on the notion that such a thing could be possible. He heard me with dignified patience and rejoined: "Science is but an infant stumbling on the path of knowledge. Feeble, yet bold. Disciple, I do not assert that it is the stellar influence which produces these effects. I do not know. I assert only that by using these calculations one obtains information which can be verified. Yourself has seen the truth of the calculations you have made so far as they relate to the past. You will live to verify these that relate to the future. But what I would have you know is this, that when the indwelling (subconscious) self, which is the heritage of many past lives and experiences, is at one with the Divine and at one with the outer faculties of the man himself, the same knowledge flows in through many channels, for all knowledge and wisdom are from the same source. I have gained the very same information from clairvoyance, clairaudience, divination, and in many other ways, and always it was the same, and it mattered not which means was used. For indeed this inner self when rightly dealt with has access to all knowledge, being itself immortal and a part of That Which Knows."

I thought this explanation as clear and near as one is likely to get to the mystery of a tremendous subject. It incited me to follow the uphill way he marked for me then and later.

This important matter done, I asked permission to lay before him the progress of my own private interest and

beseech his advice. I told him all that had happened and he listened with the closest attention, entirely approving the steps I had taken and agreeing with my views as to the intentions of the Empress and Li Lien-ying. They would certainly use every means to secure the knowledge of Ho's treasure cache from me, and would then put me out of the way. He recommended that when the Boxer troubles were past I should visit the Temple of the August Peace and investigate for further treasure if it could be done without exciting the priest's suspicion, unless I was sure he could be trusted. That would really depend upon his attitude to the present rulers of China. I must remember that a mighty movement was stirring now against them and sides would be hotly taken, therefore, caution! I must mention him to the priest and judge by his reception of the name. I thanked him as gratefully as I felt, for I was beginning to realize that the blind man was a mighty strength in the land, with mysterious political powers, also, entirely beyond my comprehension.

I then ventured a step farther. Would he now condescend to tell me what he knew of the Mallerdean history? I remembered vividly with what anxiety I waited for his decision, the blood pumping up into my face. The prize I had been hunting for two years seemed so near me now that everything for or against my winning hammered at my heart, and I leave any impartial man to judge whether such beauty as Sië's and such a treasure as Ho's were not enough singly to fire a man into action, and, together, to send him through every danger to the gallant end. But here I reaped the advantage of my

thirty years. I was no hotheaded young donkey to go dashing up against the impossible in the shape of the Empress and Li Lien-ying. Not I! I knew the tricks of the Japanese wrestling which they call jiu-jitsu, and applied them here. Stoop to conquer, seem to yield while most pushing the action, give an inch that you may gain an ell, and above all neglect no scrap of information, for any word may be the clue to the maze.

So while my master hesitated, I dared a propelling word:

"My venerated master, you know the fight is unequal between a poor adventurer and these mighty ones. If I have any hope of success it is in your wisdom and goodness. I beseech you to give me all aid that is lawful, and this not for my own merit, for I have none, but for the sake of the noble Yang Lien who commended me to your guidance, and that of this Lady Sië who is so pitifully in the power of those who would use her for the basest ends if her own courage and goodness did not befriend her."

At the mention of Yang Lien's name I saw a quiver of emotion pass over his face. At the mention of Sië's he held his head high like any brave man who hears of the danger of a good woman. Instantly he spoke:

"My disciple, look about with care and observe whether there is any possibility of human ear hearing what I would say. I dread, as it were, the very fish swimming in the lake."

I searched every corner with my eyes. I rose and walked behind the great bronze incense burners; the marble pillars of the distant pavilion; the tall bronze

cranes; behind everything where a rabbit might be hidden. I crossed the exquisite little marble bridge which centred the lake. Then, at last satisfied, I returned and sat myself by his feet and entreated him to go on. Even then he spoke in a voice so low that it only just reached my ear.

"Disciple, my great-grandfather was in the service of Ho, and, like Ho, a man of ready wit and quick replies. But he was an educated man, and though Ho hid his want of learning under brilliance of speech, he was obliged to lean often on my ancestor to cover his ignorance with the brocade of his own learning. It was my ancestor who presented John Mallerdean to Ho, and he who, when the exalted Emperor was ill, was the means of presenting John Mallerdean in the Presence, and he cured the Emperor of a dangerous sickness and so secured his own fortune. And before Ho himself knew that he was doomed my ancestor knew it and bid him prepare for the inevitable. So then the three took counsel together—Ho Shen and John Mallerdean and my ancestor—and John Mallerdean said:

" 'If all this wealth is to be taken by the new Emperor, surely, my masters, it is imperative that a part be saved for my Lord's family who else must starve.'

"And so it was agreed among them. Therefore a portion was given to the care of John Mallerdean and a portion, by far the most valuable, to my ancestor, and each was bidden to take it where he would. For Ho trusted them both, knowing them to be honourable men, and in that respect his wisdom served him well. But this he said very earnestly:

" 'My servants true and tried, do in this matter what is just and honourable and sure shall be your reward in this and in lives to come. But hide from me utterly where you secure this treasure of mine, for they will torture me and in the dire anguish I may speak and nothing be left for my descendants.' And all saw that this was wise. So, taking them many times to his great treasure places, gradually they removed much, and John Mallerdean had the help of another man of his own country whose name I knew not. But a soldier.

"Now there was in Peking at the time a man of the mixed blood, yours and ours—a bad man who brought shame on his people, and this half-breed made his living among the Canton merchants because he knew the ways of both peoples and was a cunning and skilful go-between; and Ho had employed him in some transactions with the English, and then, with the pride and carelessness of great men, used him no more and forgot him. But this Vernon did not forget, and on all that was done he kept a jealous eye, and it is known that he informed the Emperor that Ho was secreting his riches, and so hastened his end."

"Was there any quarrel between John Mallerdean and this Vernon, my wise master?" I asked, marvelling to see the skein of fate unwinding itself so simply from all its tangles.

"That I cannot tell, but this I know, that on a certain wintry day John Mallerdean set out carrying treasure in small bulk, for the three knew not that the fall of Ho was upon them. And before he went he called my ancestor apart and said in his ear:

" 'Honourable friend, the time is come. I go, but I may not return. You, I know, go by a different road to the same end, and dealing with great men and their treasure is perilous work and it is very possible that neither of us will escape our doom. Were it well if we exchanged some token of where the treasure is hidden, so that if one dies the other's secret is not utterly lost?'

"And he answered:

" 'This is a good thought, but let neither tell the other plainly, for if we are caught and tortured the pain might wring it from us. Tell it in a mystery so that if we shriek it out in agony those who hear may not understand. It is a chance the more for our master's treasure.'

"And John Mallerdean said:

" 'Good thought, my faithful friend. Then if I return no more, ask in the Tiger's Den where I have hidden my secret!'

"And my ancestor laughed and replied:

" 'The tiger is a deadly beast. For me, I go farther. If I die, ask the Thousand Wise Men what I entrusted to them.'

"And they separated, neither knowing more than this, and John Mallerdean never returned and men believed he had been false to his trust and had fled away with Ho's treasure in a great English ship that waited for him in the Gulf of Pechili. And my ancestor was caught and tortured, suffering in silence, until just before the breath left his mutilated body they questioned him for the last time, and in a great voice he cried: 'Seek in the Tiger's Den. I know no more.' And so died. And when Ho

himself was tortured, in his anguish he revealed where his treasure was hidden, but what he did not know he could not tell, and therefore these two hiding places escaped."

"Your ancestor was a brave and faithful man, master, more faithful than mine, for he revealed the hiding place of the emeralds to Vernon that he might save his wife by a swift death. She was a woman and in pitiful danger, but a trust is a trust."

"You are hasty, disciple. It is not permitted so to judge the deeds of those who have gone before us. Those emeralds were John Mallerdean's own, not Ho's treasure, if I recall your own story. They were the fee of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung to John Mallerdean for many services and the cure of his disease. John Mallerdean was a true man. He sacrificed his own hard-won wealth rather than betray the trust Ho reposed in him. Ask pardon of the ancestral spirit and be slower to judge."

I accepted the rebuke with shame. True—and this opened up the whole question, for now it appeared probable that all the riches I had seen at the temple were the property of John Mallerdean and Colonel Keith, who had finished their work and were possibly leaving China, knowing that Ho was doomed and they with him if they lingered; and the former had used it as a bait to draw the half-breed from the real treasure. Good man, John Mallerdean! That girl Sië came honestly by her fine courage and quick wits. They were a better heritage than even her ocean-blue eyes.

"Forgive the dullness of this contemptible one," I

said, feeling a worm before his calm judgment. "Your rebuke is well deserved, most wise, and I accept it humbly. Does your inspired wisdom then believe I have seen nothing of the true treasure as yet?"

"Nothing. John Mallerdean took his secret with him. But return to the temple and question and observe with caution—such caution as you would use in approaching a sleeping tiger, for the Empress is up and doing."

I meditated.

"And your ancestor, wise one— Can your supernatural intelligence decipher his hint of the Thousand Wise Men?"

"Not as yet. But now I know the time has come I will use all my means to decipher it. What he said before death was set aside as the delirium of a dying man, and I should not now be repeating it but that your bond with John Mallerdean gives it life. The conversation between the two men was overheard by the wife of my ancestor and she repeated it on her deathbed to my grandfather, her son, and it has floated down like a straw on a river. It was thought they were jesting with death."

"Men have done that before!" I said. "Perhaps it was no more."

We sat silent, with the wind softly lifting the willow branches and the crystal wind bells suspended to them—a day and place of peace if it had not been for the booming of the guns. That scarcely ceased night or day. It was a mystery to many how the legation contrived to reply—whence their store of ammunition was drawn. I

lived in terror those days of hearing the answering rattle cease, for that silence would mean the end.

And as we sat the blind man said suddenly:

"Repeat your story from the beginning," and composed himself to listen.

I did so, touching every detail, however small, for I knew a master mind was listening who would not be swayed aside from the truth by anything he heard, and would perceive a clue where I saw nothing. He put his finger on it instantly.

"The river before you climbed to the temple— What was its name?"

"The Flying Tiger!" I said, a blaze of light bursting on my dull brain.

"Of course," he said composedly. "That is your clue. That river will lead you to the secret. As to the Thousand Wise Men—it will come in due time. No need for haste. The Empress must be dealt with first. Keep your own counsel. And now tell me who comes, for I hear steps."

It was more than I could, for he had the amazing perception of the blind developed even beyond what is usual in them. Quite two minutes elapsed before I saw Sië descending the marble steps that led to the Empress's quarters, and even then I could hear nothing for she came like a roseleaf floating on a breeze. I stood up, conscious that my heart was beating.

Let me recall that little gracious figure as she glided toward us in the declining sunshine, for I had never had the chance to study her before. I can never say she walked, for that word fails utterly to convey the melting

grace of every movement. In her long, swathed, brocaded coat of peach-blossom satin with a rich bordering of worked flowers, you could not see her little feet. You could not see her little hands for the splendid sleeves that fell like drapery below them. Her face was no more Chinese than the Empress's. The Manchu type, especially in these highly, bred women, is much nearer to the European. Her eyes had not the Chinese slant. They looked out straight and clear under the Mallerdean black brows. The nostrils were delicately cut, the mouth beautiful with a fruitlike fullness of the little lower lip where it kissed the upper—infinitely seductive. Put my cousin Sië in our dress, and who would guess her strange eventful history? None. And if any think I exaggerate—let him look at the portraits of the Manchu Empress among her court ladies and he will see that many of them might pass unnoticed in Paris or London except for their beauty. Not that it matters. I know beauty when I see it, be it East or West, and Sië was like a rose in June, with her black hair smooth as satin over her jasmine brows.

As we both rose and bowed before her, she came and saluted us and said softly:

"The message of the Empress. She has read the words of the illumined sage and she commands that he and his disciple attend her at the Hour of the Dog, bringing with them her completed horoscope."

She made as if to go, but I intervened.

"My cousin," I said, "this superior man knows our story. If you have time to spare I would tell you a part of it in his venerable presence."

She looked startled for a moment—a ripple on the surface, and then with a look of perfect trust, replied:

"My cousin, you are as my brother. What then have I to fear? What you think well is well, and I bow before the venerable person who condescends to be interested in this humble woman."

I cannot express how much her words delighted me. There was a straight, direct courage about her that was the last thing I could expect from an Oriental woman. It opened the way of hope for us both as nothing could have done. If she understood and dared, if we acted together with the blind man to back us, I believed we might yet be too much for the Empress and Li Lien-ying.

She stayed half an hour by the little jewelled watch at her girdle. She sat on a marble bench beside us, and listened with absorbed interest to my story of the Temple of the August Peace. I had such faith in her by this time that I told it all as straight and true as I had told it to Yang Lien and the blind man. She paled a little on hearing the frightful fate of her great-great-grandparents, but after all—even in China the passionate emotions can hardly reach over four generations, and I could see that it was my connection with it and with her that naturally interested her most.

Twice Li Lien-ying passed and shot a look of approval at our little group of three. He had an absolute and well-founded reliance on Sië's powers of beguilement, and I could see the greed in his eyes and the covert leer of satisfaction. It pleased me uncommonly—considering all things.

When I had finished my story and the blind man had

added his, she was in possession of all our facts, and I begged her to give us hers. She spoke modestly but clearly.

"Wise and learned man, I have but little to say to you and my honoured cousin, for what knowledge and insight has a woman? I have been as a bird blown down a great wind with no power against it. The child of whom you heard in your vision in the temple was placed, as the priest told you, in the noble Yang family of Peking, Manchus and courtiers, and there at the age of sixteen she married a great Minister of State who took her for her beauty and accomplishments. The Emperor who hated Ho died, killed by lightning at Jehol, and the family rose high in Court favour with succeeding Emperors and at the time I was born it seemed that we were among the greatest. Then my father offended the present Empress by memorializing against her extravagence and ill living, and he was beheaded and my mother committed suicide and I was left desolate at the age of four. All my father's possessions were taken by the Crown and I owe the very garments I wear to the bounty of the Empress. I am now eighteen, and I am told that in a year I shall be married, but to whom I cannot tell."

"My noble daughter, is the Motherly Countenance harsh to you?" asked the blind man.

"Harsh even to blows, great sage. But not only to me— You know her temper."

"I know it. Then do you desire deliverance?"

"With tears and prayers."

"What would you do if you were free?"

"Venerable sage, I hear that there are many girls in

this my country now who desire education and the power it brings. If I had the money of which my good cousin speaks I would go to Europe and be taught, returning to teach these pitiable ones who walk in a great darkness of ignorance."

He smiled with approval.

"My noble daughter, it is a good thought. Doubtless it comes from your ancestral spirits who were learned people. I believe a life new and beneficent will be yours. But great perils must first be met and conquered. Have reliance on your cousin. In his country women are not always the prey and man the hunter. They clasp hands as equals. I desire that before me and in the presence of the all-seeing heaven and earth he swears to protect you as his sister until he places you in safety where you would be."

If I had needed inspiring, his calm confidence and Sië's would have touched me to the quick, but I did not. I was already her sworn knight bound to the great adventure. Her blue eyes fettered and armed me. Her courage delighted me. It was worth fighting for a comrade like that. I laid my hand in the blind man's and swore by the all-viewing heaven and earth that I would be a true man to my kindred blood, and would set the girl free to follow her own desire. And, when I turned and looked at her, two tears that made her eyes April bright were clinging to her long black lashes. I thought it was then that I began to love her, but who can trace the mysterious beginnings? There came a time when I thought I never had done anything else.

CHAPTER VII

WITH this information the blind man was able to tell me a little more of her family when she left us. All China knew of the fearless Manchu nobleman Ching Chi, who, sickening at the degeneracy of the once conquering Manchu Dynasty, like Yang Lien, dared to give the Empress his rebuke. There had been a friendship between his father and the Empress which perhaps gave him courage to attempt the impossible, but it did not save him. Later I saw the memorial he sent her and understood with joy that if Sië inherited valour from John Mallerdean she did so also and at closer quarters from her own father, a true patriot if ever there was one.

It was the Hour of the Dog when we again entered the Hall of Reception on our knees. The scene was set exactly as before. The Empress on her stately chair, raised a little above us, the Empress Consort, who was understood to share all her statecraft, beside her, watchful and sinister, Li Lien-ying at the other side, Sië in the background.

We made the kowtow and respectfully awaited commands; I, meanwhile, taking what glimpses I could in an exceedingly cramped position.

The Empress almost looked her age; the anxiety and furious tempers of the last few days were telling visibly on her. The eyes were set in dark puffy rings, and the

flesh beneath them was discoloured. The lines at the corners of her mouth looked indented and seemed to pull the lips down. Her honorifics of speech were scanty and evidently she had no time for politeness. She spoke with stern brevity.

"Blind man, I commanded you to see. Why was this young man used?"

"Celestial Majesty, I, an old man, was so weary that my spirit had no strength for the chariot of vision. I sent him instead and will guarantee his sight for true. His wings are strong; his eyes clear."

"Then I demand that he now be sent to see."

My horror may be imagined. It flashed on me that in the trance where all safeguards of reason are put to sleep I might speak some most dangerous truth, might implicate Sië and myself beyond hope. And with a secondary flash I saw that the Empress might use the occasion to question me about the jade dragon. But what could I do? You cannot temporize with despots. On my knees I waited for what might come.

"Whether the perturbation of his mind before majesty —" began the blind man, and was snapped at instantly for his pains.

"Try. It is your part to obey. Now—I wait!"

I dared not attempt any signal, and no word was possible. I caught a glimpse of Sië's face white as death behind the chair. She did not know what to fear, yet feared unspeakably.

The blind man drew from his bosom the crystal—held it up, and commanded me to look at it. I stared dully at it and the light began to waver and swim in its

ball like a moon. I felt my brain dazing—dazing. The figures about me wavered and blurred and disappeared. Suddenly and amazingly I heard the blind man's voice in some strange language utterly unknown to me. What was it? I could not even tell that much, not a word could I understand. My fainting brain argued: "Foolish—foolish. I cannot understand"; and then gradually my reason lost hold, virtually dead for a time, and in that new strange sphere I understood his words as if they were my own. "Understand and speak in this language and no other, and, when you wake, *forget.*" Then all wavered into dark and quiet.

I knew no more until the picture came, and then I saw the dingy Mohammedan mosque at Kuan Shih about twenty miles from Peking (a place I had often ridden through), and a small crowd of village people gaping and staring about it at the Empress as I had seen her before in the coarse clothes of a Chinese peasant woman. Her hair was dressed flat to her head, unlike the splendours of the black-winged Manchu headdress she almost always wore. She was getting out of a common country cart, travel-stained, old, weary—without any of the accessories of royalty. But I knew her—who could mistake the imperious anger of her face? The Emperor dismounted listlessly from another cart—the doors of the Mosque were open, prepared to offer them a miserable refuge. She made a motion of disgust and fatigue to a man at her elbow. Hush!— I could hear. The Emperor, seeming to pluck up a little spirit, looked sullenly about him.

"We have to thank the Boxers for this!" he said,

A sordid, incredible, revolting picture of royalty in deserved downfall. I saw many more details than it is needful to tell here. Mule litters setting out; couriers arriving; confusion; noise— Then darkness.

I came back confusedly and slowly without the dimmest notion at first where I was. I was lying on the ground, the blind man touching my nostrils with some essence. The first thing I heard consciously was the Empress—raging, furious.

"What? Never! It cannot be. You have interpreted wrongly. Wake him. Drag him up that he may speak for himself. Ask him here—before me. Say no word to him in that spirit talk. I will have no cheating. Speak—or it will be the worse for you."

So she raged on. The essence recovered me to that same strange lucidity of mind that I had experienced before. I remembered all but what I had seen—that had disappeared like mist from a looking-glass, but I knew the blind man had spoken in a strange tongue before I was dispatched on my errand, and I trusted to Providence for the rest.

I got slowly on to my knees in the orthodox position.

"Repeat to me what you have seen just now."

"Sacred Majesty, I cannot. I forget."

She showed her teeth at me in a kind of snarl.

"If I have it flogged out of you with bamboos, can you remember?"

"Sacred Majesty, ask the sage. He knows what I saw. I know nothing."

"What did you see yesterday? You wrote it down for your master. You know?"

I dared not refuse. I repeated the paper we had sent by Sië.

"True, that is it." Then, turning to the blind man: "He spoke in an unknown tongue. Did you interpret truly?"

"Truly, Augustness."

"Then you declare that the Court is to flee before the Allies?"

"I declare it, and am willing to perish if it be not true. The sight cannot err."

"Do we return?"

"The sight cannot go far into the future. Its domain is chiefly the past and present. I cannot tell. Beyond a few months, the images waver like reflections in water. But the horoscope reveals this."

"What was the language he spoke?"

"I cannot tell. In this state all languages can be spoken and understood. When it is past they are forgotten."

She paused and considered.

"Show me the horoscope."

It was reverently presented through Li Lien-ying. She cast her eyes over it hurriedly, then slowly, then with fixed interest. We had divided it into four heads, omitting the two clauses which referred to the Empress Consort and the length of her own life. The fury died out of her face like fire in ash. She paled into a kind of grey pallor, then, rousing herself, she struck her hand with its long, gold, jewel-cased finger nail on the paper.

"It is true?"

"Sacred Majesty, the stars cannot lie. And your con-

descension will recall that much of this I predicted twenty-four years ago."

She turned to Li Lien-ying.

"Bring here the earlier horoscope."

While he was gone she leaned her arm on a rest beside her and her chin on her hand, staring with stern fixed face into the gathering gloom of the piled shadows in the corners of the hall. She was awe-striking then, I own. I could read the dominating power that had put her where she was, the arbitress of millions of fates. Still as death we all waited. Presently she said in a low voice that yet was terrible:

"The Son of Heaven—is it true that I ascend on the dragon the next day following his death?"

"Augustness, it is true. This I know for certain, having had it by many means of knowledge, which all agree in one."

"Strange!" she said, and relapsed into meditation.

When Li returned with a cylindrical case in his hand, the sound of his step was relief for it relaxed a tension scarcely endurable. He unrolled the paper before her, and she read, holding the new one in her hand for comparison.

As she read I ventured a look at Sië. The colour had returned to her face, her eyes were steady and calm. Whatever my ordeal had been, I read that I had passed through it without betrayal. I hoped once more. Presently the Empress laid down both papers.

"Blind man, the predictions of your earlier horoscope have been fulfilled. You are a great sage. I prize your counsel above any I possess for you have the courage

to speak truth, and the rest tremble and fawn and lie. Now tell me, what shall I do? Great are my straits."

"Sacred Majesty, outside the sight I have no wisdom. I, with my disciple, can see sights, but how to deal with them is a case for the mighty, not for this contemptible one. I lay my hand on my mouth."

She meditated a moment, staring into the gloom.

"In dealing with the rulers of other countries," she said at last, "the wise Chia Li said long since that the right course is to tempt them with all the allurements. Presents of wealth. Rich food and banquets. Musical maidens, fine jewels and beautiful women. To simulate affection, to express honeyed sentiments, to treat one's inferiors as equals. This is the way to win their friendship and deceive them for our good. What think you, blind man, of this course of conduct? Gain them I must."

"That it well befits your sacred Majesty and that it is the wisest wisdom this world has to offer," he replied meekly; and well could I read the inner meaning of his words! She could not, and smiled gratified.

"Li Lien-ying, go out and instantly dispatch a magnificent gift of foods to the legations. Have a letter written in my name stating that I am tortured with anxiety for their fate, and that my righteous indignation with the Boxers needs only an opportunity to be washed out in their blood. Write all I would say if—if this were what I truly meant and believed. Blind sage, it is certain that I must flee?"

Li was going out quickly, when she recalled him.

"Send a necklace of pearls to the chief lady and tell

her I recall with tears the happy day when we met, and pray to the all-viewing heaven for a return to those friendly joys."

He disappeared. The Empress Consort leaned over her and whispered something. She spoke again:

"Disciple of the sage, again I ask you, what is the truth as to the jade dragon? Be it known to you that it was a part of the riches of the rich man Ho condemned to die by the illustrious Emperor Chia Ching, and it is included in certain lists presented to the throne. But when the authorities seized this treasure, the dragon with much else was gone, and from that day has not been seen. Now, if you will speak truth and point the way to the recovery of this treasure, enormous rewards shall be yours, riches, a bride of the most beautiful, high in favour, and a place at Court where your wisdom shall be richly rewarded daily. Honour, wealth, beauty—these are the rewards I promise."

I could see the glitter of the Empress Consort's eyes. She had very much the temperament of her imperial aunt, but without the dignity and the implacable exterior to hide her thoughts when she would. Where the other was terrible she was waspish. She looked now as though she were about to sting! I knocked my head three times on the ground.

"Celestial Empress, I have nothing to add to what I formerly had the honour to present before the throne. I was on a journey and in passing through the village of Kao-ping my foot struck this precious thing in the Woodpecker Lane. How precious it was I knew not. That is all I know."

"How should such a thing come in a village lane?"

"Celestial Empress, bands of brigands were roaming the country and more than one person found traces of their passing. I have no other suggestion to make."

Again the Empress Consort whispered. The other went on as if she had heard nothing.

"If later any deceit were discovered, your perspicuity would know what to expect. Now rise and depart, having taken your reward."

Sië placed a little casket containing two pearls, a larger and a smaller in my hand. We edged out backward, kneeling, and the last sight I saw was the vast hall, heaped with shadows, the Empress's white face in the gloom, with the figures of the Empress Consort and Sië rigid on either side of her chair. An impressive sight. One might take it for an omen of the destiny overtaking her dynasty—fading into the gloom.

In the garden after our dinner I eagerly questioned my master and he told me what had happened. Seeing the danger, he had put forth power and had spoken to me in a language unknown both to himself and me, and in that language I had answered and he interpreted; and if it seemed incredible that in this abnormal state (which should be normal if we knew and grasped our powers) all languages should be as one, let me state that this very power is known to the investigators of psychic subjects, and that it has been demonstrated fully and openly in Japan of late years, by a man named Tomekichi, with a certainty that cannot be doubted. For the truth of this statement I can refer to living witnesses. But why should it be wonderful? All knowledge is one

at the source, and language but a man-invented division. The marvels of the subconscious self are perfectly consecutive and even logical when one holds the key.

My master told me that on hearing the Empress's command he closed his eyes for a moment, flung himself into communion with his inner self, demanded a language unknown to those present, and spoke with certainty; and, transmitting this power to me, with certainty I answered. I asked what language it was, and he replied that he believed it might be Malay, for he had once heard in Formosa Malayan traders speaking their language. But he could not tell for certain. I am sure this episode will be dismissed as mere fiction, which it is not; for, as I say, it can be substantiated.

It is needless to say I do not know a word of Malay in the normal state.

I asked what I had said and he told me what I have written already, adding that he suppressed certain incidents, such as the burial of a great part of her wealth in the palace gardens under the supervision of the Empress Consort, and other details which even now I think it unwise to give.

He then said:

"Here, in the garden, we must now only communicate with the utmost caution and in full daylight. As we entered the hall I heard a sound behind the drum of a pillar and a breathing which convinced me that some person was hidden there in case we had spoken Hakka or any language likely to be known in China. Figure spies everywhere! Distrust the very air."

Then, approaching his lips to my ear, he breathed:

"That horoscope has saved the life of the Emperor Treat him as she may, she will guard his life jealously now that she knows it is bound up with the continuance of her own. And the knowledge given and withheld will ruin the Manchus."

I need say nothing of the next few days except that by a swift experiment on a chance suspicion I discovered that the kindly-faced attendant who had more or less superseded Fox-face understood Hakka. No matter. We had been too careful for him, and in fact it was of service, for as if slipping gradually into carelessness, I let things fall before him that should give the impression we desired in high quarters.

This led to my concerting a scheme by which their interest with regard to the treasure might be led down a very different track. In other words, I drew a red herring across the trail, and very successfully.

I took to speaking of Ho's treasure when I knew the attendant was within earshot, a few words at first, later a little more, as if the matter weighed on my mind. I might have taken a less roundabout course by simulating a "sight" when he was at hand, but my master would have no trifling with a matter so terribly real and sacred to him; and in truth I myself had such a respect now for these only dimly understood powers within us, that in no case would I have ventured on any tricking them. But I own it seemed justifiable to me to use a little mild deception by means of the methods known to all men. When my plan was matured I breathed it to my master as we sat under the willows in the broiling heat of August. No-

thing but the water and cool green shadows made it endurable there, and what it must have been in the legations I dared not think.

After a touch of repulsion at the thought of any deceit, he agreed that my proposal was wise and might be forgiven in view of the facts. He told me that he thought in the voice of the attendant he had recognized a young man named Chu Fu, high in the favour and confidence of the Empress Consort. No doubt in placing him about us they had counted on my master's blindness and my ignorance. This confirmed me in my intention. And I set to work.

That evening, when we returned to our rooms, we sat by the windows in the dusky coolness and I reverted to the jade dragon, speaking softly in Hakka.

"Master," I said, "is it your enlightened judgment that if anything further occurred to me about the imperial dragon my duty would be to communicate it to the Old Buddha?"

"Disciple, who can doubt it? It might be a clue to what her Majesty desires. The duty of a subject is obedience to imperial commands."

"But if it were a thing uncertain?"

"Seek to acquaint yourself with the truth, and lay it dutifully before the throne. The will is accepted for the deed with her Majesty."

"But I must needs leave the palace and travel to Tai-Yuan to make my inquiries."

"Alas, my disciple, the sight has declared that the throne itself will shortly be at Tai-Yuan. I counsel you

then to wait a little, for this is certain, and if we are taken in her Majesty's train, you can then make your inquiries. But of what nature are they?"

"My master, I have met another person within the last year who recognized the jade dragon. For when I was passing through Tai-Yuan I stopped at an inn known as that of the Benevolent Blessings, and it so chanced that a traveller saw the precious thing about my neck, and he said: 'Young man, how came you by that dragon?' He was of distinguished appearance and one-eyed. Naturally I did not answer. Finally, after two days' acquaintance I warmed him with wine and in his cups he said plainly that this was a part of the lost treasure of Ho, and on this I asked him if it was known where it was hidden, and he answered thus: 'Young man, I have myself seen a part of it, and it is lodged in a temple, but the name of that temple is a secret, and now that I remember I have told even as much as this to a stranger I am indignant at my own effeminacy. Question me no more or it will be the worse for you.' And he rose up in great anger, and went away; and when I got up early in the morning he had taken his horse and was gone. I inquired if they knew him and they said they knew nothing of him, but that his name was given in the inn as Tai Lin."

"But why, disciple, did you not report this to the Motherly Countenance?"

"Because, Venerable One, I feared she might believe I knew more, and endeavour to extract my knowledge by painful means. And also I thought that could I travel to Tai-Yuan I might perhaps light on the treasure and re-

ceive the rewards promised by her Celestial Majesty."

My master questioned me, but I stuck to this obstinately, verifying it with many little details not worth giving here. I told it all with an air of simplicity that I knew was highly effective, and I was certain it would reach the mark, for my master's undeceivable perceptions distinctly overheard a listener in the next room. If so, it would serve my ends in more ways than the one, for if Sië was to be dragged at the Empress's heels in the flight, I wanted to be there too.

She came often in the evening with words from the Empress, and lingered with us or with me alone, watched no doubt by many peepholes from the palace, but able by the lake to speak with freedom after all precautions were taken. I cannot hope to convey the charm of that intercourse snatched in the very jaws of danger. Her quiet courage and steadfastness, her gaiety whenever the shadow of fear lifted for a moment, the sweet pliability of the Oriental woman mixed with the self-respect of the Western, seemed to me to combine every charm of East and West. I dare say that many men would not have felt it as I did. Be it remembered I had spent my life in the Orient. Until some years later my personal knowledge of Europe was limited to five years at school in England and nearly all my interests were Oriental. The women of my own race whom I met in Peking or at the ports had not struck either my fancy or my heart. Sië did both. She moved in an atmosphere of romance woven by my strange adventure in the Temple of the August Peace, and by these stranger days in the palace. It drew us together in deeper ways than I can tell here.

No outward sign of affection was possible in that eye-swept place and with treachery lurking in every coign of advantage, but I knew my own heart, and I thought that I began to know hers.

After consultation with my master I decided to pass on the precious story of the jade dragon at Tai-Yuan to Sië, with instructions to let it escape to the Empress. My reason, of course, was to protect Sië by letting the Empress suppose she was worming secrets out of me and was therefore useful, and also to make certain of further interviews. She undertook this office readily, for of late the Empress had shown a certain impatience that she had so little to report. Heard thus both from Sië and from the attendant, I knew she would attach importance to the story. She did, and nothing could exceed the attention that surrounded us, and Sië's freedom to come and go.

Once she procured me permission to leave the palace on errands for my master—a wonder unheard of. It was necessary, for a dreadful report was current that the Empress's gifts and protestations had seduced the Allied chiefs into the belief that she meant them well, and it was said they would accept her new offer of having all the Europeans escorted by Chinese troops to Tientsin and handed over to the European troops and embarked there for the coast. We in the Palace knew that every man, woman, and child would be murdered if these fatal beliefs were accepted. But I got out with Sië's help and though I was watched and spied upon with every step I took I got the word "Cawnpore" (and never was it more

applicable) sent to my friend in the legation, and it was useful.

I asked Sië how she was questioned as to her progress with us. She said, with a faint but most lovely blush:

"My cousin, the Empress trusts that you will be like wax in my hands—"

She paused, and I ventured to say:

"Sië, am I not wax?" and to rejoice in the little sparkle I saw dipping under the long black lashes.

"But she thinks, my cousin, that I can make you speak against your will and things you should not!"

"And would I not for you, Sië?"

"Not for me, nor for any woman. What is anything worth beside honour? But here they do not know. The air of this place is poisoned, and foul things grow in it. How should they believe in courage and faith? There is not a man nor a woman here that you could not buy, and gold is the God."

"And you, Sië—why are you so different?"

"I cannot tell. I have a bird in my bosom," she said with touching poetry, "and it sings to me of things that I shall know some day—in other lives if not in this—faith, and truth and kindness. I would choose to be a part of those things when they come my way."

"You are a part of them now," I said, "they are as natural to you as its colour to a flower."

She smiled a little.

"At least I love them," she said, and changed the subject. She never cared for discussing herself. I think what she best liked was to forget the hateful palace and

ask me about the wide free country outside. It is almost inconceivable how caged her life had been. Except for the Empress's trips to the summer palace, beyond Peking and a few visits to the palaces of other royal ladies, she had never been outside the Forbidden City. And yet she was not ignorant. There was a library of Chinese books that she had access to and they included a few, a very few, translations made by the Jesuit fathers when they were in favour—translations of one or two of Scott's novels, some histories and travels. It is marvellous on what scanty nourishment a strong, clear understanding can grow, and Sië's was all that and more. She hungered and thirsted for knowledge and freedom. Dare I say that after a while I believe she thirsted for them the more because I was ahead of her there? Ahead? I was ashamed to think how little my opportunities had done for me compared with what her starvation had done for her.

Well—the long and short of it is that we became good friends and my heart clung to the only creature of my own blood. The Empress was right. There was nothing I would not have told her. The Empress was wrong. There was nothing in the wide world, not to mention the imperial treasury, that would have tempted her to betray me.

I pass over the next fortnight, having indicated its outlines, to which I must only add that I spent the time in studying my master's methods under his direction and acquired certain powers—far indeed below his, but useful, as shall be told hereafter.

Will it be believed that, in spite of all the terror and

danger, the Empress still had the Palace actors almost nightly to perform the plays in which her soul delighted? Still she had the water parties with music on the lake and as much appearance of gaiety as in the good old days when the world danced to her tune. And, on more than one occasion, saying that the guns made her head ache, she stopped the bombardment of the legations that she might enjoy herself in peace. An extraordinary and indomitable woman. I used to wonder if Queen Elizabeth in her royal courage, caprice and extravagance was anything like her.

And now it was August, and news came pouring in. The Allies were marching on Peking. The Old Buddha needed no "sight" to tell her the fearful truth, and we saw nothing of her, heard nothing except through Sië who came daily, and brought one day a frantic message to ask if we had any magic that would slaughter the foreign forces as if with thunder and lightning. This we disclaimed. She told us that the Empress had said she would commit suicide and force the Emperor to do the same rather than flee before them. It was certain at all events that whatever she did he would be compelled to do, for her jealousy and hatred raged fiercely at the possibility that the Allies might dethrone her and restore him to power. With his reforming instinct it would have been a blessed day for China if this had happened, but the time was past and her clutch on him too strong. He was broken in spirit.

CHAPTER VIII

I SHALL never forget the fourteenth of August as long as I live.

We were in the garden, and I was reading a famous Chinese book to my master and learning from his comments, when suddenly the guns of the force besieging the legations ceased. The silence was stupefying. They had now gone on so long, so incessantly, that when they stopped it seemed as if the world had come to an end in a whisper and then death.

I leaped to my feet. Even his placidity was startled, and he felt about him with sightless eyes.

"What is it—tell me, tell me, disciple?"

I could tell nothing and there was no one to ask. Half an hour went by, and then, with no warning, broke out a tornado of far mightier guns than we had heard as yet. The air was tattered and rent with fearful sound. These were never the guns we knew so well—these frightful roarings of destruction! I knew then. The Allies were bombarding Peking.

I told him, and he said with his own composure:

"It has come. Put our small possessions together in the smallest compass, disciple. We go to-morrow."

I went in and did as I was bid, and Fox-face came in and found me at it and threw up his hands in amazement.

"This it is to have supernatural wisdom! I was sent to bid you prepare!" he said. "One of the dukes has

just rushed into the Presence shouting, 'Old Buddha, the foreign devils have come. Your Majesty must escape at once, or they will murder you.' "

"Her Majesty's sacred life is secure," I replied. "This we know by our powers. When do we go?"

"This insignificant one cannot tell!" he said. "May the curse of all malignant spirits light on these foreign devils who drive us into the wilderness!"

Like the pampered menial he was, the soft-handed wretch feared the open and its freedom. There is no life in the world so sapping as the enervations of an Oriental palace sinking down into ruin through its own iniquities.

We sat up till late that night expecting orders. It was midnight before they came—Sië, flitting like a bird through the perfumed dark. She stood with the window framing her and our light on her face, pale, her eyes glittering with excitement and—was it pleasure?

"To-morrow we go! There has been a grand council, and it is decided. She has ordered two of the ministers to go with her and the Son of Heaven. The rest must follow as they can. Be in the courtyard at the Hour of the Tiger. (Three A. M.)

"Do you go?" I said eagerly, for she was turning.

"I attend the Motherly Countenance!" she said, and was gone.

Shall I ever forget that morning with the faint dawn grey about the peaked and wide-swept roofs of the palace? To see history made before one's eyes, to see my own visions acted out in reality, to share in the haste and panic of the moment—what an experience! And all

punctuated by the thundering guns which took no rest. Country carts were drawn up—common country carts such as one sees daily wending through the streets of Peking, springless—abominably uncomfortable. All the ladies of the palace had been summoned to the courtyard for three thirty A. M., but none were to accompany the Empress except only Sië, and she would certainly have been abandoned also but for the hold it was believed she had on me.

No European man's eye had ever seen the Palace ladies before and probably never will again. They stood in lines, numbers and numbers of them, white and terrified in the cold faint light. No wonder. They expected nothing less from the foreign devils than rapine and bloodshed of the worst. A flock of frightened sheep they looked, but with a kind of splendour in their long embroidered coats, and stiff Manchu headdresses, brilliant with pins and flowers and dangling ornaments. So etiquette was sustained to the last. There were so many that no special face impressed itself on me. I kept describing the scene very tersely to the blind man. I think there was a kind of sombre joy in his heart to be thus present at the beginning of the end of the Manchus.

Presently the Empress came out attended by Sië. The Empress! I could not even think of Sië for considering the amazing turns of human fate. She was now a common elderly Chinese peasant woman in the blue cloth one sees everywhere. Her hair was plastered about her face like a Dutch doll. She looked old, furious, shabby. The Emperor, half dazed, came behind her in a long black

gown. And then an amazing, a horrifying thing happened.

A beautiful woman (my vision, my vision!) detached herself from the crowd of ladies, and came forward, making obeisance to the Empress.

"Who is she?" whispered my blind master; and an official, tense with watching, whispered back:

"The Pearl Consort, the Emperor's secondary wife!"

Now I knew. The only heart faithful to him in the Palace—the only human being he loved and trusted. As he spoke, the Empress Consort came hurriedly out and took her place at the Old Buddha's shoulder. The contrast between the two wives—the one all beauty and dignity, the other—what I have described!

Then kneeling, in a calm, firm voice the Pearl Consort addressed the Empress. We could all hear her words clearly:

"Sacred Majesty! is it a time for the Son of Heaven to flee from his capital? Should the Ruler of the Great Inheritance flee like a woman before the face of the foreigner? Leave him here, I beseech you, while you seek safety in flight. Let him act kingly, that the foreigners may respect us. Go yourself and seek safety, but the Emperor should stay."

There was a blank silence of horror. Even the Empress seemed stunned at such an audacity. I saw a brief fire in the Emperor's faded wearied eyes. He stepped forward. He opened his mouth to speak, he raised his hand. And then the storm broke.

The Empress shouted aloud to Li Lien-ying and the other attendant:

"Throw this wretched slave down the well. Let her die this instant!"

I stirred and caught my breath. The blind man tightened his hold on my robe.

"You swore to be silent!" he said under his breath. The Emperor fell on his knees, raising his hands in prayer, trembling in every limb—a pitiable, sickening sight. Yet would any courage have saved her in the Empress's then mood? None. Li Lien-ying and Fox-face moved forward and put heavy hands on the brave woman's shoulders, and as they dragged her away, and the Emperor still besought for mercy, the Empress cried aloud in a voice that echoed round the place:

"Let her die at once as a warning to all undutiful women who resemble those owls who, when fledged, pick out their mother's eyes."

And they dragged her away and threw her down the well and cast great stones on her, and not a voice, not a hand, was raised in her defence except only the Emperor's. He turned aside and covered his face with his arm.

"Get into your cart!" she ordered; "and hang up the screen. The Heir Apparent will ride on the shaft. Sië, follow me into mine. Blind man, get into another with your disciple. Li Lien-ying, you must ride and keep up as best you can."

Then, to the carters, composed as if stepping into her royal sedan: "Drive as hard as you can, and, if any foreign devil stops you, say we are poor country folks, very much afraid and fleeing to our homes."

The gate was open, the horses were whipped up and

the whole tremendous scene faded into the past—the women, having prostrated themselves with the Empress Consort at their head, all standing stiff and straight as the carts rolled out. And so the last glimpse showed them as the gates shut to behind us.

I am not ashamed to own that the tears were in my eyes, for I had never seen and never shall again a picture of such despairing courage as that brave, lovely, devoted woman's. She was right—a thousand times right. If the Emperor had plucked up courage and asserted himself then he might have saved not only her life but the dynasty. But no; it was too late, the cup of their iniquities was filling to the brim. It would soon run over.

In a whisper I told the blind man I should never forgive myself for my inaction. Better have died like a man than see such an iniquity done. The only thing that restrained me had been fear for Sië and for him.

"Disciple, my life is of little moment," he replied indifferently, "but in any case it was secure. I shall die on the day the Empress visits the Yellow Springs (dies) and that is some years away. But you would have slaughtered yourself and the young lady, who deserves a better fate. And remember this—it was gross insubordination for the Pearl Consort to address the Old Buddha in such a manner and in public. What should a woman do in such affairs? Though it would have been better the Empress had shown mercy, still it was a fault."

The Chinese point of view! I could say no more.

We reached the summer palace at four P. M. and there the exodus paused long enough to provide tea for the Empress while she sent written instructions to the Em-

press Consort to bury all her treasure in the courtyard of the Ning Shou palace, and therefore by the deadly well that had received the Pearl Consort.

As to the Emperor—he seemed perfectly stupefied with grief and fear, almost beyond feeling, except that I noticed he shuddered violently from head to foot when the two attendants who had murdered the Pearl Consort approached him.

We then resumed our flight.

There is no object in my chronicling all the sordid miserable incidents until we reached Tai-Yuan, for I had no share in those days except being dragged along with the rest like a piece of lumber. I am thankful to say that after the first three days Sië had a mule litter, as had also the Empress. When they got out of the miserable carts to make the change the Emperor said aloud: "We have to thank the Boxers for this." And the Empress sternly commanded silence.

It was so exhausting, penned up in those miserable carts, jolted and flung about the shocking roads and tracks, that neither my master nor I had the smallest inclination to talk. And really there was nothing to say. The excitement had been so long and so sustained that now there seemed to be a kind of collapse and mere endurance of the discomforts of the day, and the sleepless horrors of the filthy inns took all our thoughts.

What astonished us more than anything, however, was the elastic courage of the Empress. Never in this world has there been a more wonderful woman in her way—East or West. Over sixty, driven out, ruined, as she thought, fleeing for her life, the Emperor might give way,

but she never! I declare before heaven there were moments when I thought she deserved to rule, when my sympathies would almost have gone over to her side but for Sië and the Pearl Consort! When we were crossing the hill pass of "The Flighting Geese," she stopped the whole procession of us (a long one by now, for many ministers and courtiers had joined up from Peking), that she might admire the view. I can see her, with her head stuck out of the litter, staring about her with the liveliest interest!

And then with unmistakable enjoyment:

"It reminds me of the Jehol country."

She shouted to the listless Emperor to look out, too, and with the relish of a young woman in her wicked old eye, she said:

"After all, it's delightful to get away from Peking and see the world, isn't it?"

"Under happier circumstances it might be," he answered with a sigh. She turned contemptuously away to take a bouquet of wild flowers somebody brought, and sat enjoying the view and sniffing at them. It was impossible not to feel a kind of unwilling respect for her at times like this. I said as much to my master and he shook his head.

"I could tell you deeds beside which what you have seen is as nothing, disciple," he answered. "The evildoer needs to be courageous since he affronts both heaven and earth."

CHAPTER IX

AFTER this fashion we reached the town of Tai-Yuan where we were accommodated in the Temple of Fo by special order, and next day the divine condescension was manifested, for she sent for us. I was on the alert at once. In the present state of affairs and with ministers, courtiers, and all kinds of people coming and going, she must be hot on the scent of the treasure to spare a moment for us.

Great jealousy was felt of our influence when that summons reached us, and many an envious eye fell on me as I led my master toward the courtyard of the splendidly furnished yamên where the Old Buddha had at last found rest for the sole of her foot. The countryside had been swept for comforts, and many notables had made their court by sending their best. The place was swarming with them, each with his own ax to grind, and in the very wind was a murmur of intrigue. I passed the watchful groups with an air of haughty abstraction, for in China, as all over the Orient, it pays to assert oneself. As for my master, he had no part to play. Since he honestly did not care a snap of the fingers for any one of them, or for the Empress herself into the bargain, his gait was the perfection of serene superiority.

Li Lien-ying was waiting for us, and I shuddered as he drew near. Since the affair of the Pearl Consort I preferred his room to his company with an emphasis that

I cannot express. I could not look at his large supple hands without imagining—but no matter. He was part of the game I was playing and it was necessary to use him.

"Honoured persons, you are to have the felicity of seeing the Old Buddha."

"Is her sacred Majesty in the enjoyment of good health and spirits?"

"The Benevolent Countenance is uplifted with joy at the magnificence of her reception here. She is serene as a summer's day."

He turned and ushered us through a hall splendidly decked with gold and silver vessels for her use, into a large inner room, where she sat alone with Sië, the Empress Consort being still in Peking.

She had resumed her own dress though without the magnificent adjuncts of Peking, and I really thought the trip had freshened her up—which was not surprising, as a contrast to the cloistered sloth of Peking. We crawled in as usual and were almost affectionately greeted. Truly it was a summer countenance that shone upon us!

"My faithful servants, my heart has been overcharged in thinking of the discomforts and misfortunes which have attended your faithful following of our sorrows. Do not doubt that this will be remembered in every way to your advantage. The imperial memory is long."

We were as humble as the occasion demanded and she went on.

"We are now at Tai-Yuan and shall remain here for some days—possibly longer. Disciple Yuan, a rumour

has reached us that in this very town was once a person who recognized the jade dragon."

I executed a carefully prepared start of terror. I had guessed this would be forthcoming. Her Majesty hastened to reassure me.

"Fear not, young man. Let truth be your guide. It is not well to play with the mighty, but truth invariably meets with approval. It appears an attendant of the Palace overheard some remark you let fall to this effect, but he only caught a few words and may be wholly mistaken. Still, be candid. It is the better way."

So, as she thought, she saved Sië's reputation and kept her still a useful spy. I fell on my face before her chair, and began a most effective trembling and plea for pardon.

The Benevolent Countenance beamed.

"Young man, we who see into all hearts know it is very natural that modesty and alarm should have caused your words to stumble. But speak out now. Make us the judge of this circumstance."

Thus urged, on my knees, and with eyes fixed on the ground, I repeated my story with the addition that the one-eyed man had said it was prophesied that the discoverer of the lost treasure would be a member of the ruling family. I knew that would interest and alarm the old lady who disliked most of the imperial family as cordially as they feared her. I then was silent, awaiting her pleasure. She reflected a long time. At last:

"You will have a list made of all temples in the Shansi district and make every possible inquiry. Report every smallest detail, and now let your master fling you into the

sleep so that if there truly be anything to see we shall see it."

Then, suddenly collecting herself: "No, it was to be found by an Imperial Person. Why should I desire that any eye but my own should see this matter? Put me now here—this instant—into the sleep that with my own eyes I may see!"

The start I made then was entirely unrehearsed. Not in my wildest dreams had it occurred to me that things might take this turn. For a moment it bewildered me, and then I felt it was impossible. What might not happen? If I hypnotized her she might see the Tiger's Den through my eyes. She might see other things on which our very lives depended. It might take any turn. I looked at the blind man and saw that his face was set and his very hands shaking. Revolutionary as he was, almost superhumanly gifted, still remained the very root of the Chinese nature—a reverence for the function of the Throne in spite of the unworthiness of its occupant. For the moment I was left to my own devices and something very near panic might have seized me but for Sië's calm presence behind the chair. She relied on me entirely. How could I fail?

"Sacred Majesty, if it were one of 'the stupid people' (the masses), how then could I object? But when it concerns the Divine person—the Ruler of the Jewelled Inheritance, my heart trembles within me and I become as a sick man near his end. How is it possible that I should dare to send the Sovereign of the world to meet the Spirits? How is it even possible that I should

succeed, for who can dominate the Heavenly Intelligence? Permit this slave to attempt the sleep himself." I prostrated myself before her. She angrily bade me rise.

"To argue with the great is insolent and moreover extremely unwise. Also it wastes time which should be respected. Obey my commands."

The blind man interrupted:

"The Tutelary Deities avert their faces from such a thought. Should the occupant of the Dragon Throne be subjected to the will of a humble person? And moreover there are risks. Who can tell—"

She interrupted him, laughing harshly:

"My life has been all risks. Shall I shrink from them now? This is a matter of consequence. Sië, command Li Lien-ying to guard the outer door that none may enter. Stand yourself by the inner, holding it ajar, and if you become alarmed by anything, call loudly for Li. Blind man, I hold you responsible for my life. Now, what should I do? No—say no more. Direct me."

She must be keen indeed on finding the treasure if it made her defiant of her ingrained superstition. There was that in her face and tone that took the heart out of argument. Nevertheless, my master tried once more.

"Your Majesty, knowing the dangers, I disclaim all responsibility. Let this lady bear witness that what is done is by your Majesty's order, and that with my disciple I protested."

"You disclaim responsibility. I accept it. Waste no more time. I grow angry."

She looked it. No more could be said. With my

temples beating to a wild measure, I took the crystal from my master and directed her to lean back in the imperial chair, reclining her head and composing her august mind. She did so obediently, and the ill-timed thought occurred to me that I was like an unskilled dentist hovering round a first patient's chair. Would it be kill or cure? Anyhow, I was in for it.

Sië at the door, with face turned from me, the blind man kneeling in palpable alarm, only the Empress perfectly fearless, I took up the crystal and she fixed her gaze resolutely on it, haughtily obedient. I remember thinking that of all the instances I had seen of her courage this was the greatest, recalling her intense fear of the unseen, her unwavering belief in any manifestation of it, however crude. Very unfit myself for the business, I repeated the hypnotist's formula, wavering at first, then strongly, loudly, all but hopelessly. At first her eyes outstared the crystal, then, at last, they began to fix and glaze. Her head fell back. She was off—I had got her! The sleep came, and I regained my self-possession in a flash as I stepped forward and bent over her. My master covered his face with his sleeve. The deceit, the indignity, shook him to his very soul. Ah, had I taken his warning and ceased even then!

"You see a temple in the hills. A very lonely place, a long way from here. There is no road, only a rough stony track, a few pine trees stand about it. The priest is a man blind in one eye. Beside it stands a monument to a lama who died on his way from Tibet, to pay his respects to the Sacred Throne in Peking. You see within the temple now. There is a white image to the

Amitabha Buddha, and other images sit about it. You see beneath the floor for nothing can stop the sight of the Spirits. There is a deep underground chamber with boxes and bales all about it. They bear the name of Ho Shen. Read it. See! The priest comes down with a light. You see him. He opens a box—there is a tinkling inside. Hear it! He holds the light. Stoop over him. See the dark green glitter of emeralds, the flashing of diamonds, hear the dry rustle of pearls. Riches inestimable. You see images of gold, each more than two feet in height. You see great bowls of topaz, Gold vessels heaped one on the other. It is a cave of treasures. You see the great pearl known as the Good Omen. Plates of jewel jade three feet across. Splendours, riches, wealth even for the Sacred Throne to be amazed at. Note that the pine trees stand about the temple and high rocks tower above it. It is a place where the wild beasts cry and slouch at night, a safe lonely place for the concealment of the greatest treasure in the world."

I need not tell all I said. I repeated, I impressed, I forced it in upon the awake self that was hidden under the sleeping self whom almost a third part of the world knew and feared. I seized my chance and was strong with the strength I never knew I possessed. The strangest scene, for still my master hid his face, and Sië at the door never looked my way.

Twice the Empress moved her hands as if clutching and grasping. Twice she said in a strangled whisper: "I see; I see—" and that was all. I kept her in the hypnotic state for more than ten minutes, as I guess,

then slowly withdrew her from the inward to the outward again.

"You are returning. You have seen. Remember what you have seen. Forget nothing you have seen. Now return, and when you awake send to search for the treasure. Return."

Again I need not tell all the steps which I had learned from my master to recall the inward from its quest. While she still lay in a kind of coma I said to my master: "The Thousand Wise Men could not have told her more" —half laughing at my own success; for it seemed to me a triumph beyond triumphs that I should have subjugated such a spirit to my will. At my bidding she returned obediently: slowly the waking thrills ran up her hands, twitched the muscles of the mouth, unclosed the lids, lit the dead eyes, and in a moment more she was staring fixedly at me as I knelt. Silence. Presently in a drowsy voice she said. "A most excellent sleep. No pain. No hurt. I saw."

Silence again. Then I ventured:

"What did your Majesty see?"

"The lost treasure of Ho Shen. Trees of coral. Boxes of emeralds and pearls. Much more."

"Did your Majesty see where it can be found?"

"That is my own business," she retorted, wide awake instantly. "You have done your part well; there is no more for you to do at present. Sië, give them the reward appointed. Stay. Sië—did I speak?"

"Twice, Motherly Benevolence, but at this distance I could not hear the words. Very low were they and brief."

"Illumined sage, write down the words I said. Write them in silence and let no one see."

My master took the ink brush Sië gave him and wrote two characters. Except that the characters were larger and more straggling than ordinary, no one reading but must have thought he saw. She looked at them, then straight at me. "What did I say?" sure now that there could be no collusion.

I answered instantly.

"Your sacred Majesty said: 'I see, I see.' No more."

She smiled, pleased. Then aloud: "I saw what I needed to see and no more. Like the famous story of the thief of the Chi State, what I saw was the gold and nothing but the gold."

She shook her sleeve in token of dismissal, and we crawled backward to the door. My master was still pale and troubled. All China is run on precedents. If a thing has never happened before, that is the best of reasons why it must never happen, and certainly in all the centuries of court witchcraft no one had ever heard of the hypnotizing of an imperial ruler. And there was the deceit.

Once outside, he said:

"My disciple, lead me to some quiet place beneath the trees where I may speak."

I did so. The whole town was humming and buzzing with excitements and comings and goings, and donkeys, mules and horses crowding the narrow cobbled streets. I found a little nook where all was quiet and safe. Then he spoke, very low, and still with the fear on him.

"I have not been satisfied, disciple. My spirit is sore within me. The ruin of this dynasty I crave, for in it lies the only hope of China. It is as needful as the amputation of a gangrened foot. But even this woman I would not thus mislead or deceive, for to use the influence as a means of deception— Oh, disciple, that was ill done and a curse follows. You will see! The Law is not mocked. The reward is sure."

"Master, do not say this. If the Old Buddha found this treasure it would be spent on evil pleasures and wasted. If it comes to the Lady Sië, she will do noble things with it for your country. You do not wish it in the hands of the Empress?"

"No—a thousand times. Yet, evil cannot bring forth good."

"And furthermore, you know yourself I did but send her to sleep as any juggler can do. I did not use the higher methods of those who know. Is it not true?"

"It is true. With the higher methods the Empress would see nothing. I warned her. Yet—"

"True. Leave this to me, my master; you soar so high above the earth that you do not know what needs be done with its evil influences. I swear before you that for or with the Empress I will never use the great secret. How should I? She is not fitted for it."

"True. She is not even in the darkness that precedes enlightenment. But this reward she gave me? It cannot be touched or used."

I opened the small casket and looked at the pearls of price that lay within.

"You are right, master. This we cannot take. I will throw it into the wood."

"For a bad man or woman to pick up? No, disciple. I know a poor widow in Peking whose husband the Empress slaughtered. She has a son to educate. This will do it. I will send the money to her."

And so it was done. We took infinite pains that evening to barter them with a rich man at Tai-Yuan who was fishing in the troubled waters of the Court, and my master sent the money by a sure hand to Peking. And he instructed me still more deeply in his secrets that my foot might slip no more. But his peace of mind was gone for a time.

For days Sië was not visible, but I was not anxious about her, for I knew the Empress would consider that she had rendered an inestimable service in that her information had led up to this vision.

The Court now removed to Hsian-fu in Shensi, on the report that the Allies were sending an expedition after them, and we followed by order. Things were in a more settled condition there, and the Empress kept a liberal table and enjoyed herself to the full with birds'-nest soup, sharks' fins and all the delicacies she loved. As for the Emperor, he never really held up his head after Pearl Consort's cruel death. I was told that he lived on hermit's fare, and turned with sickening revulsion from the heartless pleasures of the Empress. The fate of the Empire weighed heavy on him. He knew well that if his own schemes of reform had been followed up things would never have come to this pass. It was indeed a tragic spectacle. The woman who dominated him had

all the force of character, he all the insight to better things, but he had no strength to impose his will, she no will for anything but power and riches. The better in the grip of the worse! I never saw the unhappy Emperor Kuang Hsu close at hand but once, but that impressed me deeply.

I was standing with my master in the courtyard of the yamên at Hsian, waiting, for we were told the Empress might need us. It was almost empty, for word had gone about that she would give no audiences that night. Only a few attendants were breathing the chilly night air, unlit by any moon. Presently a man came out and stood in the doorway looking up at the stars. We were in the shadows and he did not see us, but we could see him dimly in a weak light that streamed from some lamp inside.

There broke from his breast a deep, deep sigh, a heart-breaking sigh, as he looked up, and then I knew it was the Emperor, robed in black, overwhelmed with sorrow dark as the night.

At last he spoke to himself in a kind of sobbing whisper:

"O for rest! Birth is not a beginning. Death is not an end. The Wheel turns and turns and will not cease."

In silence my master prostrated himself and I also. The sound reached his Majesty, and he turned sorrowful eyes upon us.

"Who are you?" as we rose to our knees. Then coldly: "The wizards of the Empress? Leave this place until she summons you."

And as we rose to obey he said, relenting: "Would

that you, or any, had such wisdom as might make life endurable and death a hope."

"Son of Heaven, life is joy, and death is more life," said my master with the sincerity that no man can mistake. The Emperor moved forward a step. I saw his face, a dim whiteness.

"You an old man, poor and blind, say this? What is your reason?"

"Son of Heaven, I have seen through the illusion to the reality—and it is ascent and joy."

"And the end?" His voice was a sob. My master paused, and the Son of Heaven repeated:

"And the end?"

"Joy shining and calm as the sun reflected in the sea."

A long silence. The Emperor resumed: "If you have the true sight—what is the end of my dynasty?"

"Ruin!"

"I knew it. You are a true seer. And the Empire?"

"Ruin, my Lord and Emperor. And beyond it a mighty future for the people."

"You are a true seer. The Emperor passes. The people cannot die, and for myself—who am a Lord of dust and Emperor of dreams?"

"The prison door opened, the feet unshackled, a new life and a great one."

"Rest is my desire—rest only."

"Son of Heaven, what you could, you did. He who is faithful in little is rewarded by greater tasks. You will return in the revolving of the Wheel and lead this people greatly."

A dead silence. The Emperor stretched out his hand

in the dark and laid it on my master's. He turned, and reëntered, cold autumn in his heart, autumn in the world outside. The falling leaves were dead hopes. We were alone. We went quietly to the gate and back to the temple where we lodged, as at Tai-Yuan. My master opened his hand and wordlessly showed me a little almost worthless ring of inferior jade. He touched it to his brow and lips, and hid it in his bosom. I could not have spoken. Something in my throat choked me. The Empress did not send for us that night.

CHAPTER X

LATER she did, but only for a short interview to give orders. They were short but not sweet. I was banished from the Court. Not in the least because I had fallen from favour, she was careful to explain, but simply because my master could do all that was necessary, and she was anxious to avoid expense and the crowding of people about the retreating Court. Also, she needed my services elsewhere. I should be furnished with a sum of money and passes, and she could rely on my fidelity to report if any news should reach me of the treasure of Ho. If that were to happen there would be enormous rewards awaiting me, and a bride high in imperial favour. Here she cast a glance at Sië who stood as usual with down-dropped eyes beside her. I was at liberty to leave that afternoon—the twenty-fourth of September. Interpreted, I knew this meant several things. She wished to be free from the only person whom she might now suspect of power to acquire knowledge concerning the treasure. But he must not be killed, for this knowledge might lead him to discoveries which Sië could gain for her. In a word, she wanted to pursue the quest quietly on her own, and at the same time to profit by any discoveries I might make on mine. No doubt, also, she believed that by retaining my master she could keep a searchlight of the "sight" on my proceedings. In fact, the game was now in her own hands.

She was amazingly well and in high spirits that morning. No one seeing her in her becoming Manchu headdress of black, with gorgeous jewelled pins and flowers, would have given her a year more than forty-five. Like all women of wit and spirit, she was physically sensitive to outside influences, and the fact that the Empress Consort had arrived from Peking with the news that the Allies had not looted her treasure or discovered its whereabouts, refreshed her with gay youthfulness. Of course I kowtowed and protested obediently, but my heart was heavy. To leave Sië—heaven only knowing when we should meet again—to leave my master, to lose all the threads of the intrigues I was weaving into coherence—well, it was a blow and no mistake. I respectfully inquired where the Empress wished me to begin my inquiries, wondering if this was the first stroke of the punishment my master foresaw.

She had no orders to give on that point. I was to do what I thought best, always bearing in mind the vast rewards that awaited success. Also, if I acquired any knowledge of the movements of the foreign devils on my travels that was to be reported. I should be notified when I might return to Court.

I asked if she could furnish me with any clues from her vision, and she briefly repeated the description of the temple which I had impressed on her in the hypnotic sleep. I asked if she had seen any treasure with it.

Yes, certainly; she had seen it and had realized that all she most desired was to be found in that temple with its one-eyed priest. If I heard of such a one I was to do

no further investigation on my own, but to report instantly to her.

We departed with an almost merry farewell from the Empress, so pleased was she with herself and the world in general. Every one about her knew those fits of gay good-humour. A sunny morning, however, on the Benevolent Countenance did not always insure a fair evening.

We went off to the quiet spot where we had talked before, and I was very little prepared for the emotion my master showed in parting from me.

"Disciple, my son," he said, "very grateful have your kindnesses been to my heart, and how to let you go I know not. The thought of a stranger in your place is oppressive to me. I had thought to pass on the whole slender store of my knowledge to you, that in you it might ripen into wisdom. If this is not to be, yet remember, I beseech you, the little you have learned. And dare this humble person ask that you remember him also with condescension?"

"With affection warm and true," I said, clasping his thin hand, and meaning every word of it. "It is I who entreat your gracious remembrance. And I beseech you to protect the Lady Sië and to encourage her with your wisdom and goodness. Will it be in any way possible that you could communicate with this unworthy one through means not used by the ignorant?"

For he had told me strange tales of how those perfected in wisdom could communicate across far lands and seas.

"My son, I cannot tell. I can send the message in-

deed, for this I have done more than once. But whether you can receive— Nevertheless, do this: Every night at ten o'clock as your people reckon, sit for a while alone. Compose your mind. Unite your outer with your inner self, closing your eyes to the objects of sense about you, and it may be that in a moment of need we may ride on the wind and bridge the air. But I fear much that the deceit you practised is against us."

I understood the allusion to the sage Lieh Tzu of whom it was said that he could ride the wind and command it, and joyfully agreed. Every day my faith in my master increased. His humility promised always less than he could perform.

We were slowly returning to our abode when a man ran up to us in hot haste.

"Great and honoured Blind Man of Hupei, return swiftly. High honour is done you. A Court sedan chair stops at your dwelling enclosing a Pearl of Beauty who will not alight until she knows you are within. So I, your slave, a worm of the dust, have hastened to inform you."

"Distinguished person, accept my gratitude," and we hurried our steps, little crowds commenting as they always did on the Sage of Hupei and his favoured disciple. No doubt the fact that we were in the train of the Empress accounted for much, but the blind man's reputation was almost as wide as the Empire itself.

It was of course Sië, come publicly by the Empress's order and bringing the money and passes for my journey.

She entered with pomp and dignity befitting a Court lady of the Empress, and observed a magnificent air of

ceremony and mingled humility and condescension, the Court manners in perfection. Briefly she spoke and gave her precious packet and with it another and beautiful pearl set in a large thumb ring, and then, bowing, prepared to depart. I knew her precaution was absolutely necessary. Every wall there would have ears, but she had made her preparations and I mine, and as she bowed with crossed hands I saw in one the gleam of paper, and as she glided by she slipped it, I can scarcely tell how, into mine.

Aloud I said only: "Lady of superior merit, I leave you happy in the protection of the Benevolent Empress and the wisdom of the Sage"—but I knew she understood the look I threw toward him and that a slender line of communication was established. We both attended her to the sedan chair and knelt till she was out of sight, a proceeding much less hurtful to my pride than the Court crawlings in which I had become an adept.

When she was gone I read her letter. It consisted of only three words, for writing was a deadly danger.

"Truth. Affection. Fidelity." But I knew the wisdom of her precaution and it was sufficient.

And I wrote an answer which I entrusted to the blind man—also sufficient, though, like hers, it consisted of three words. She had used the character for "affection" which denotes kindred or family love—the expression a sister might use to a brother. I used the character for lover's love—the love that the poets and romancers of China have celebrated in common with poets all the wide world over. And the three words I wrote were: "Love. Remembrance. Fidelity." That was my first

love letter; and really, if one comes to think of it, all that is necessary in any case, though a Western beauty might despise it in comparison with the two or three sheets in the rough-and-tumble familiarity of our people. Still, with the Western chances of a divorce or breech-of-promise case, it might have its uses. Distance is, however, perhaps one of the reasons why China is exempt from such scourges. Familiarity breeds contempt all the world over.

My master took charge of it and promised to repeat the words if it were not possible to deliver the precious scrap of paper. He promised much more. I went away lighter in the heart for knowing that his strange powers would be as guardians about the girl I loved.

Yes. Loved. I knew that now. It was a thing to be reckoned with in the future and therefore to be faced, though no one knew better than I the doubts, the dangers, very possibly the miserable end, included in that simple statement: "I love Sië."

CHAPTER XI

I WILL touch lightly on the next fortnight. I made a bee line for Peking. I had no fear that I should be watched, for the Empress had plenty on her hands for the present, and for that matter had no reason to believe me otherwise than devoted to her service. Every night at ten o'clock I withdrew from whatever company I might be in, to loneliness and silence. But no word came through.

I found Peking in an indescribable state—the Allies in charge but much indiscriminate looting going on. Though all my sympathies were on their side, it was painful to see destroyed ancient monuments of inestimable value and interest to the future of the world, but the whole thing was so natural after what had come and gone that it was impossible to blame even if one must regret.

There was a strong movement afoot to get the Court back to Peking. It was felt by the Allies that the Empress irresponsibly roving about China was a greater danger than under the watch of the Allies in Peking. Asked secretly for my opinion as to whether she would return, I could only say that I knew such advisers as Li Hung Chang and Jung Li were all for a policy of conciliation and return and had great weight with her, but that with her temperament one gust of rage, like the typhoon, might always sweep her from her moorings and

bring ruin even more swiftly on her dynasty. I could not mention the horoscope.

But my work was not in Peking. I went straight forward to the Temple of the August Peace. Not now as a Hakka man, but simply as a Chinese gentleman of education. That would be much more difficult to trace if ever her Majesty took a fancy to keep an eye on me.

At the beginning of my strange story I have described the approach of the weird temple, and it need not be repeated. But as I went along the rough tracks now ungraced by flowers, for it was October, memory held my hand and walked with me every step of the way. Then I was an European with the boy Yin to anticipate all my wants; now I was a Chinese with only the simple wants of my people, bound on a pilgrimage to the temple of the Buddha who abides in Eternal Peace. I had not yet made up my mind as to whether I would reveal my identity to the priest.

I certainly need not discover it, dressed as I was now and possessing the ease of talk and manner acquired in the Palace. What I said must depend upon circumstances, for mine was emphatically a business where I must feel my way step by step.

I own that when, in the shortening day, I came in sight of the great grove of silver pines my feeling was almost one of fear. Those strange pillars of beaten silver upholding their black clouds of foliage overshadowed my soul with a sense of doom. We must indeed be part and parcel of nature, so quickly do we react to her moods, and here they were awful. As before, the trees, with their secret to keep, watched and waited. If they had

been ranked and dangerous human beings they could not have been more masked. They had seen, but would not tell.

I brushed through the thick carpet of the fallen pine needles of centuries, and looking up saw above me the temple on its terraces. As I climbed them a chilly October evening breeze woke up with some mysterious message from nowhere, and from far below it brought a faint muffled roar of "The Flying Tiger" waterfall: then, shifting, shut it off as if it had never been.

Dead silence, and the dusk creeping from its ambush among the pines. I stood on the first terrace and looked about me. In the two years which had passed since my visit the forest had advanced on the terrace, and little saplings climbed with knotted feet in the crevices of the stones. Weeds flourished in rank abundance among the belladonna lilies whose withered lamps were burning down close to the mold. Desolation and loneliness. I ascended the steps to the second terrace, thinking the priest might be at his prayers. Strange as it may seem, I dared not affront the silence by calling or shouting. The very sound of my own steps sent light thrills of a kind of horror through me.

On the second terrace, no one. I looked into some of the ruined cells and found them as I left them except that the draperies of green vine, now brown with autumn, had made strong headway and waved their banners from all the walls and windows. The whole place seemed to be lapsing gently down to decay, quietly absorbed into nature. I fancy it would not take long for the greatest cities to do this. The legions of the grass and forests

are innumerable, swift and pitiless. But it was ghastly in its beauty, for all that, a subtle insult to the lordship of man. We pass; they remain.

I ascended the third terrace and the dusk was chilly at that height and from a darkening cloud came a splash of cold rain. I summoned my resolution and called:

"Is the honourable priest of this august temple at hand? A traveller would present his respects and prayers."

Silence. I called again. And then far off in the distance I heard a faint movement. It came from the great cavernous hall where the golden Buddha sat in colossal calm. I drew a little nearer to the vast blackness and stood looking into the unlit dark within, faintly fragrant with incense. My heart beat fast.

The sound increased and the priest came slowly out, supporting himself on a stick, and I started, for those two years had aged him almost out of recognition. The stubble on his ill-shaven head was white, the lines in his face like the caricature of a Japanese ivory, his walk feeble. But still he kept the cold remote kind of a look about him. A man unlikely to speak except at the right moment and under pressure—a lonely man, the human expression of a deserted place.

He gave me the usual salutation, and then, leaning on his stick, waited my pleasure.

"Venerable sir, I am come to visit the temple in pursuance of a vow and to make my devotion before the Buddha of the August Peace."

"It is a worthy motion, distinguished person. May I ask if you have brought provisions with you? For I

have little here and what I have is unworthy the attention of such a highly-born person as your speech and dress lead me to suppose you."

"Venerable servitor of the Enlightened One, I have brought a few crusts, but what is good enough for your own exalted self must be far beyond my lowly deserts, and as I purpose a stay of some days, I beg in all humility that an arrangement be accepted whereby I make an inadequate offering of money for food and accommodation."

This offer he coldly agreed to. It was clear from his manner that he wanted no one, but of course I knew the rules of the faith would prevent the rejection of any suppliant.

He said with frigid courtesy that his evening meal was cooking in his room and that I was welcome to share it. As to next day—a peasant came once a week from the Village of the Hundred Lights and he would possibly consent to make a double journey if he were paid for his trouble.

Then he led the way painfully to his room. It was exactly as I remembered it. The window filled with costly stone tracery, the walls rough as the interior of a cave, and completely draped by this time by the autumnal foliage of the wild vine. The door into the hall of worship stood wide open. I believe he passed most of his time there.

We sat down to the rough table, and from a boiling pot he served out two portions of rice, to which he added a little platter of bean curd. That was all. I opened

my bag and produced some fruit and dried fish. He refused both, and we made our meal in silence.

Afterward he spoke a little, and with astonishment I realized that he knew nothing of the fall of Peking, nothing of the flight of the Court. Public events went past the dark solitudes unseen, and when I tried to tell him a little of what had happened he cared about as much for it as one of the trees outside would have done if I had been at the trouble of announcing it. I changed my tone then. I spoke of the rapine and ruin of Peking, the wild and boiling upheaval of class and race, and after a time, and as if carelessly, I added:

"Many strange things were to be observed among the foreign devils. They who had held apart from our people mixed with them now, some asking even for bread and shelter. They are a haughty race and this was disagreeable to them."

"I hope that according to the Rule of the Exalted One they receive pity," he said indifferently.

"In some cases, yes. Not otherwise. But in visiting the house of the noble Yang Lien, now communing with the spirits of his ancestors at the Yellow Springs, I met there an Englishman whom he augustly sheltered in company with the Blind Man of Hupei."

He looked up with instant interest.

"The Blind Man of Hupei is a holy person gifted with extraordinary powers," he said. "Had you the benefit of that inestimable sage's acquaintance, if it be permissible to ask?"

"Not only so, but he did this humble person the honour

to impart such crumbs of his wisdom as my inadequate powers could receive."

"Of what nature?"

"Spiritual teachings and a few of what the vulgar call marvels, but which are known to your wisdom to be but manifestations of a higher law."

"True." A long pause, then with caution he added: "You did not in the upheaval you mentioned meet with an Englishman of barbarous name but comparatively skilled in our ancient speech?"

"I met several—these foreigners are comparatively skilled in tongues."

"This foreign person was of the family of one high in honour with the Emperor Chi'en Lung in bygone days. His name was Mallerdean."

"I have met him, Master of the Law. He was full of anxiety about some maiden he hoped to find. But the story was of little moment in the march of such great events."

"The story is nevertheless of moment," he said with his cold reserve. "And if I who never leave this place, never communicate with the outer world, and expect ere long to have passed from Illusion into the Peace, could send that foreign person a message I would do it."

I reflected hurriedly.

"Venerable sir, I shall return to Peking. It is possible I may meet him, although the household of the noble Yang Lien is now scattered to the four points of the Empire. Am I worthy to bear your message?"

"That cannot be doubted. The disciple of the Blind Man of Hupei is a person with whom kings must reckon.

The message is this. Last night I had a showing, for I know not what else to call it, and the time is at hand when matters will be made clear relating to the lady whom he sought, and the clue he seeks is here."

I caught my breath.

"A strange message, Master of the Law. Dare this unworthy one ask what is a 'showing'?"

"That is a question the disciple of the blind man needs not to ask. It is indisputable knowledge given in sleep or a state which resembles sleep. Give him the message, however, and I think he will not linger. He knows my words are not thistledown wandering in a breeze."

He led the talk away, and presently bid me to devotion in the hall of worship. It was impressive beyond all words with the golden image soaring upward from our twinkle of feeble light into the massive darkness above. We knelt and offered incense and he repeated a part of what I may call "The Creed of Asia," which I knew well from my master's repetition.

"Hail, Self-existent, who in wisdom seest the unreality of all beheld by the five senses. All the Illumined, depending on this wisdom, are without fear. All the Illumined receive the highest wisdom, for this Divine wisdom is a great and holy marvel, a magic without a peer. It delivers from all illusion, for it is Truth."

The voice went murmuring on, small and thin in the dark that closed in around our little light. But at that point I lost it, for my mind was awakened to truth. The Tiger that devoured the bones of my ancestor was the Tiger River. Of that there could be no doubt. And

"the secret den" was hard by. But yet it might be difficult to find unaided, and impossible to know how to deal with the treasure if found. Could I in any way use the "holy magic" of the scripture he was reciting?

No need to dissect my thoughts. My deeds are more to the point. We came out, left the hall to its vast and ancient solitude, and outside we delayed a moment.

"I cannot ask you to spend the night in my room, for my nights are disturbed. There is a cell to the left—that second opening. Sleep there as best you can. It is a roof if no more."

The cell I had occupied formerly. I knew the tracery of the window, the broken walls. But I had no Yin to serve me, nor any of the comforts of travel. I unfolded a long coat cloak and sat upon it, facing the window.

Presently the moon, passing solemnly over the monastery, palely illumined the court and looked in, throwing the tracery of the window black on the floor. I was tired and my brain excited by the emotions of the day. I put my travelling roll under the end of the cloak and prepared to lie down. Mechanically I wound my watch and looked at it. Ten o'clock. Then I remembered my master's injunction. With the moon for my sole light, I lay down and tried to shut out all thought of my surroundings and to focus on my master.

Difficult at first. Thoughts of Sië's fair face, of her dark expressive eyes, the sweet swift smile that touched the corners of her lips and melted in a dimple, the shy words and yielding grace—yes, it was hard to get past Sië to the "one-pointed state of mind," as it is technically

called. I banished her several times, but she came hovering back, distractingly alluring, with dreams of that velvet-soft cheek laid against mine, the sun-warm lips ripe in a kiss.

But the moon composed me. She stared so aloof and cold through the window. Gradually I let go—I fixed on my master. Across the leagues of empty dark I called voicelessly.

"Speak, I hear." Power crept into my thoughts and impregnated them with warm blood, as it were. They strengthened, shot out roots and branches, possessed me —I was but the soil they grew in. They flung out strong, swaying tendrils across the void, and, searching, found and clung. I saw him in a room I did not know, but not his outward self blinded and fettered. This was some truer self with eyes that challenged the leagues of dark. He looked, he lifted an urgent hand. Was I dreaming? No; no dream is so vibrant and living.

"Reveal yourself," came to my brain in a contact closer than any speech. "See the treasure in his keeping!"

"Can I trust him?" I flung the question to the unknown place, and the answer came straight and wordless: "Trust."

Without a sound the vision passed and again the moon was staring coldly into the cell. For a moment I doubted whether my brain had been arguing with itself or with the indweller we call the subconscious self. But no, my master and I had touched hands. What are space and time to those who know? I should never be alone any more, for he could always reach and instruct me in what

was clear to him in his great wisdom. So I then hoped.

My way was plain to me next morning as I washed at the little running water among the withered belladonna lilies in the glorious dawn. A delicious freshness steamed from the heavy autumn dews. I dashed the last cold drops from my face and hair and looked up to see the priest climbing the steps from the second terrace. He stopped with a morning greeting.

"May I speak with you a few minutes?" I said, huddling into my long coat, for there was a bite in the air on the heights. "I had a message last night that obliges me to request your condescension."

"A message?"

He was surprised for a moment, then almost smiled.

"I know. A message that rides the wind like a crane. From the Blind Man of Hupei."

"No other. And he commands me to declare myself to you." His eyes still smiled.

"That is hardly needful. Did I not know you were John Mallerdean when my eyes lit on you? But the Rites have declared that the host must accept the guest for what he seems, so I only tested you. Why did you not trust me when I spoke last night? The showing is true. The key to what you seek is here."

I was really confused. The part I had played seemed unworthy.

"Because such strange things have happened and in such high quarters, that I scarcely dare to open my lips lest the very wind should carry my words to the ears of the mighty."

"The mighty? The Old Buddha?" I saw the instant

anxiety in his face. That woman's hand was heavy over all China.

"Come to my room," he said, "and eat your rice there, and then tell me your story. That the Blind Man of Hupei should judge me worthy of confidence is like honey to my heart."

I shared his morning rice, and afterward a stolid peasant came with further supplies. I noted with what fear he viewed the priest, with what eager haste he slipped away through the silver pines, looking behind him from the corners of his eyes like a frightened hare. The place with whatever treasure it might hold was safe enough from intrusion, I could see well.

We sat on the terrace then with the risen sun balmy about us, the air fresh as at the birth of the world, and I told him my strange story from beginning to end with the same truth as I write it here. Not by a word did he interrupt. Every sentence I uttered he considered and docketed for reference, and when I had finished he spoke slowly.

"Confidence is the mother of confidence. I will trust you, my honourable guest. The blind man is right. The dynasty of the Manchus is rotten ripe. It must needs make way for something better, and China work out her salvation even if the way be bloody and wet with tears. The Manchus conquered the Mings because the Mings from brave warriors had become base and degenerate with luxury, and now their conquerers, the Manchus, are no better. Their cup is full. What is not transitory, what is not illusion, save only the Law of the Blessed One, which in time and eternity shall not change!"

The infinite melancholy in his tone touched me. This priest was a wise man, but how far below my master; for his soul was a captive in the prison of sorrow and loneliness, but my master's dwelt always like a lark in blue air or in the happy fields of peace.

But he went on:

"Your desire being now to save this treasure of Ho from the Old Buddha, who will turn it only to base uses, is laudable, and I will gladly aid you. Does it commend itself to your wisdom that we should look through what is deposited in the Buddha loft?—search through it again with care for any indication that may lead us to the greater deposit? I have never seen it since you were here. I forgot it. But the jade dragon was a clue; may it not be that there is yet another?"

I agreed eagerly, and in that long and timeless day, marked into divisions only by his prayers, we ascended the worm-eaten steps that led to the loft behind the great head of the Perfect One, and, taking the box thickly covered with dust and cobwebs between us, we carried it out into the sunlight on the terrace and took the contents out one by one. I have described them before, so I need not do so again. But I lifted the chain of moonlit pearls between my fingers and for an instant saw them about a fair neck I knew. Above the jade chains carved into beauty of fruit and blossom I could see melting blue eyes. But the priest was speaking:

"It is plain to be seen that these were gifts from the overflowing magnificence of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung and Ho Shen to your ancestor and the venerable soldier

who was murdered, and surely their hope was to get them from here to the British ship off the coast. But now that I know your story it is also clear that your ancestor used them to save the treasure of Ho from the evil half-breed. He flung them to him as one throws meat to a cur. He was a true servant. The emeralds were certainly his fee from the Emperor Ch'ien Lung for the cure of his disease."

"There is one thing that puzzles me," I said. "How were he and Colonel Keith travelling with a safe-conduct from the Emperor who hated Ho? His Majesty Ch'ien Lung who had given it was dead?"

"That is easily explained. When an Emperor gives the golden tablet it is binding on all succeeding Emperors unless it be formally rescinded and the possessor degraded. No doubt that would have been done after the ruin of Ho. Until then it would carry them everywhere. But now, search with care. The Blind Man said: 'See the treasure.' "

We looked and could find nothing. Finally I took up the exquisite landscape I have mentioned before, a landscape of rivers and tall mountain peaks and cloud wreaths blown about them, towering over a ravine where a wild river hurled itself to ruin far below. The priest looked at it with calm pleasure.

"They were mighty artists in the days of the Tang," he said. "That art, like all else, has gone down to effeminacy and ruin with the Manchu."

He was holding it unscrolled with loving care and pointing to the painter's small signature on a square in

the lower corner. I saw what I supposed to be a description of it written on the back of the silk in a faint hand.

"Interesting to have the writing of so remote a period on the picture. Perhaps the original owner's," I said.

"No—no." He adjusted his great horn spectacles. "That writing is comparatively modern. In your own land you could not mistake the writing of one century for another, honoured guest, nor do I. This refers to the subject of the picture, and the writing may be that of a hundred and fifty years ago, or somewhat later."

He read aloud: "The Tiger's Den"—then dropped it and looked at me.

I snatched the precious picture, a fortune in itself, and looked eagerly at the writing.

"Was that written by a Chinese?" I cried.

He examined it closely.

"Impossible to be certain, but I think not. There is an indecision in one character—but who can tell?"

"It is The Flying Tiger river, and that ravine is where the treasure is hidden," I said, with entire conviction. "Does the blind man ever err? He told me to search the treasure in the temple last night. I have done it and here is the clue. This very day I follow up the river."

"You have not far to go. The ravine that picture resembles is about four li up the river from here. But it has never been called the Tiger's Den so far as I know. Could your ancestor have given it this name that a clue might be preserved in the picture? Is the picture really one of this river or a chance resemblance he has used?"

"Who can tell, and what does it matter? I am off

now, this moment. Master of the Law, forgive my impatience, I will return with speed."

"Would that I could go with you, but it is impossible. Study the picture with care for any marks before you go. Do not cross the river, follow this bank."

We both studied the picture almost microscopically, and I imagined I saw two lines of shading that made a faint cross at the base of a buttressed rock. Nothing else, and that more than doubtful; but in ten minutes I was on my way, swinging down the terraces, threading the ghostly pines, almost running down the worn track that led to the rocks and the river. I left the priest packing away the sumptuous contents of the box.

CHAPTER XII

IT was not long before I stood beside the royal roar of the waterfall, swollen by late rains, thundering down from the mountains like a lion fleeing from overpowering odds, yet roaring defiance as he leaped. A fairy rainbow hung above the awful plunge, and far above the sun-warm thickets of pines stood to watch the flight. A sight of beauty and wonder if I had had time for it. But my one thought was to climb the rocks that formed the stair of the waterfall, and go on and up beside the river.

I climbed with hands and feet and stick—a good strenuous climb—and reached the top in an hour, looking back with triumph on the scarped stair. Above, on this higher level, the pines crowded right down to the river which here ran in a broken tossing sparkle among the rocks. I drank at a shallow pool, icy cold and pure, and wiped my streaming face and went on and up.

Four li is roughly about a mile and a quarter, and on level ground nothing, but it was toughish work among the rocks. At last I came to a place where the river narrowed a little between two great rocks like a portal; hunching toward each other from either side, and, climbing those, hand over hand, I looked down into what lay beyond. I saw the rocks above me rising like a staircase to the mountains and below a black ravine hedged in and dwarfed by two great cliffs hemming in the

river. No mistaking the likeness to the picture, whether the artist had seen it or no. Down I scrambled for all I was worth, and in a quarter of an hour I was in the ravine—a place of startling beauty, wild and terrible, as if the foot of man had never desecrated it. Narrowed to about twenty feet the river here was evidently very deep, the colour darkening from sparkling blue to a deep jewel green. Great boulders were strewn in and about it, the rocky sides beaten smooth and curved with ages of water wear, so that no man could have climbed along the sides out of the ravine. It would be necessary to scale the cliff above or return the way I had come. I stood considering.

"The Tiger's Den." A good name. It had all the close confinement of a den. The cliffs kept off the wind, and the air was hot and dense.

I walked about prying and peering and striking with my stick.

Now, were I writing fiction, I should prolong the agony and spin the suspense as fine as a thread before I reached the climax, but this is a plain story simply told. In one corner was a small beach of big rounded pebbles, and a great boulder flung on it screening the cliff, and as I walked round the boulder I saw a little water-worn recess large enough to shelter a couple of men from a shower.

It was a small scooped-out cave in the cliff, evidently the sculpture of the river, and overgrown at the back with brushwood, tall weeds, and one or two stunted trees sucking a bare living from the rocks and drifted earth. I walked in, stooping a little, for I am a tall man, and looked about me. Striking the rock with my stick,

instantly there was a commotion amongst the weeds as if a snake or some small animal were making off, and again I struck with my stick, pushing aside the growth to have a look. Whatever it was it had vanished, but before me, well hidden by the green luxuriance, was a rift in the cave's wall—an exaggerated burrow high enough for a man to crawl through.

Now, there are snakes in China, the sort you give a wide berth to, and to crawl on all fours into a nest of them is not a picnic, but I did not delay. It was for Sië, and in a minute more I was down on my stomach, oaring my way in with flattened legs and arms where it lowered, a damp unpleasant business but a short one, for in less than five minutes I was in the treasure house. The boulder, as in the picture, was the true guide.

Yes, it was done. The impossible was actual before me. Where now was the blind man's prediction of misfortune? Who was right now? Who had shown his skill in the face of all difficulties? I triumphed.

A faint light had followed me from the outer world, partly the reflection of the sun on the water, and after I had got my eyes used to the twilight I saw fairly well and had no occasion for my matches.

A cave about twelve feet high and perhaps more in width and depth, rough and irregular, the walls of rifted rock with crevices and shelves. A biggish box of what looked like untanned leather was hoisted into one rift, stuck in sideways like a package in a grocer's store. Packets, also sewn into leather, were hung and hoisted here and there high up as if there had been a fear that the river, if in flood, might sweep the cave, a very real dan-

ger, and I am inclined to think this foresight was justified; the thing had happened and some wild spate had washed the boulder aside from the little cave it hid. Had it been in place I never should have found the opening. I stood upright in the cave and counted. Besides the big box there were thirty-nine packages, forty in all, and the box itself was no larger than two could carry between them—John Mallerdean and Colonel Keith, no doubt. A perfect hiding place. Too perfect. But for a succession of the most amazing events the wealth might have hidden there until the Day of Judgment unless some frantic overflow of the river had swept the whole thing away.

Done! I mopped my wet forehead, took a few thorns out of my legs and sat down on the fine gravel of the floor to consider. There was no earthly prospect of moving it without assistance, but it would be as well to make certain no one had been beforehand with me.

I would rip open a package as a sample.

I reached down the nearest from where it was secured by a stout leather thong and began on the leather stitches with my knife.

Let it be remembered that the treasure of Ho ran into astronomical figures. That fact is soberly recorded in history, and he paid for it with his life. His palace, built on the model of the imperial palaces, was the glory of Peking. His magnificent garden there contained sixty-four glorious pavilions, some of them insolently roofed with the glittering imperial-yellow tiles, and everything was in proportion to this splendour. I knew that even the washbasins, spittoons and much humbler uten-

sils in his house had been of solid gold. The screens were gold—but why go on with an inventory now almost unbelievable? It is soberly estimated by historians that his wealth was at least one hundred and forty millions sterling when all was computed. And be it remembered that in those days there was no banking system or investments by which a man could put out his possessions in safety. No; all must be in visible gold, jewels, and objects of art even more precious, and the only hope was to bury them in the ground as a dog hides his bones. The greater part had indeed been buried in his garden where he kept no less than four hundred and fifty night watchmen to protect it, exactly as the Old Buddha had now done with much of her own treasure in the Forbidden City. But Grand Secretary Ho had not had the luck of the old lady!

Therefore, let no one think I exaggerate in what follows, though I own I could scarcely believe my own senses. I cut the stitches on one side of the package, and instantly there poured out a stream of living, blinding colour, gems of the purest water, rubies, sapphires, emeralds. They spilt about me in the gravel, themselves like gravel but for their glory, and I sat and stared at them. Sië's! Sië's! Unheard of, incredible riches!

But how had Ho—how had any man become possessed of such things? I could guess from what the blind man had told me—who long ago, in his first days of Court favour, had heard the whole story in the Palace. Ho, who disdained no way of adding to his assets, had been the owner of no less than seventy-five pawnshops (pawnshops are an immemorial and flourishing industry in

China) and thirteen curio shops as well. Here, then, was a small part of the fruit of his well-directed efforts. The blind man had told me he was known to possess a gold table service of four thousand, two hundred and eighty-eight pieces, amongst other trifles. But again, why go on? I sat and stared at Sië's riches. There was no man in the wide world, East or West, who would not be at her feet when the tenth part of this wild story was known.

There I sat, devoured with perplexity.

Good heavens, the charge that had fallen on John Mallerdean and now devolved on me! Well might he sacrifice his own small treasure to save what lay before me.

Were all the packages stuffed with the riches of Golconda? Anyhow, I dared open no more. I gathered up the gems in handfuls, piling them into my handkerchief, and then decanted them carefully back into the leather, securing the holes with what was uncut of the leather lacings and a short bit of string I had in my pocket, and hung it up again and crawled out. I drew the brushwood together, and then, turning, began my homeward way, wondering how many jewels had escaped me in the half light and were lying among the gravel. One takes these great events calmly when they come. I remember being much more elated over a bit of true celadon Korean pottery five years before than I was when I found the treasure of Ho. Queer it was, but true.

About two o'clock I got back, and the priest was telling his beads in the hall of worship. I looked in and did not disturb him, but sat alone on the terrace until he came out, blinking from the dark. Then I told him.

He heard it with the indifference of a man who knows that these things matter to other people, but cannot for the life of him tell why.

"I am glad, my honourable guest, that your superior intelligence is rewarded, but apart from that did not the Perfect One say: 'The man who seeks riches is like a child that eats honey with a sharp-pointed knife. Before he can taste the sweetness the knife wounds his tongue, and nothing remains to him but anguish'? And certainly if this were known to the Old Buddha your life would not be worth a day's purchase."

No disputing that. I asked his counsel.

"What counsel have I to offer in such a case? I, an unworthy priest of the Excellent One, who renounced such glittering toys as these that he might seek the world's enlightenment! I cannot even see how you can remove it. What should I say but this: Seek the counsel of the Blind Man of Hupei, and what he says do? And now I beseech you compose your mind, and partake of food, and remember that the Transitory is worthless, and only the Eternal abides."

True and most true, but my thoughts would wander for all that to the splendour of colour and worth in the cold custody of the river, and I longed to be with the blind man that I might refer the whole matter to his calm wisdom. Though still I felt I had scored.

There was no aërial message from him that night, and I resolved to depart next day on the second branch of my quest. But how and where? I put that before the priest, entreating enlightenment, for I had long suspected

that he who could induce my first vision in the Temple of the August Peace might have unguessed means of putting me in touch with knowledge. There were deep reserves behind his quiet.

"Master of the Law, if it be lawful to aid me I beseech your aid. It is necessary that I should finish this work which I inherit from my ancestor. The Exalted One, to whom all is known, sees that I have no lust for gold or jewels. But what I recover for the lady who is the descendant of Ho will be used for good purposes, and if it falls into the hands of the Old Buddha you know what will be its fate. If you have wisdom in this, I beg your assistance."

He considered a moment, and then said gravely:

"It is true, yet I can tell you nothing. If you are in doubt, return to the blind man. Yet one thing will I say: There is a village between here and Peking known as the Village of the Aged Duck. In the village resides in poverty a very singular person who failed in his examination for literary honours, it is said through some animosity of the imperial family. But this man is reputed to be a fruitful tree of general information, and, though it seems improbable, I believe that he might answer the riddle of the Thousand Wise Men."

I thanked him warmly, though the hope seemed as frail as a cobweb. Yet why should I think anything impossible whose quest had been so aided already?

I rose early next morning and he walked with me as far as the silver pines. I remember very well how he had done so two years before when my search for Sië had

seemed as hopeless as tracking a shooting star. Yet I had achieved. He stopped at the first group of trees and bowed with the distant courtesy I knew so well.

"Honourable guest, I wish you well. Your face is set toward wisdom, and if I mistake not you will attain. In this world we may never meet again, and in the Immensities beyond who can tell?"

I asked why he thought that this was our last meeting, telling him I hoped to return before long on the errand he knew.

"My time is near," he returned, "and how can I desire to live who know that all is illusion and that through death is the Way of Reality? Dare I offer an old man's blessing?"

I bent my head to receive it, moved very deeply, and he bestowed it quietly, and then bid me depart in peace. I looked back twice and he was still standing rigidly beneath the pines when I reached the drop that took me out of sight.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was evening of the next day when I reached the absurdly named Village of the Aged Duck. It would really be worth while to make a list of the extraordinarily named villages and cities of China, where what seems an amazing ingenuity has been expended on the ridiculous. I put up at an inn known as "The Inn of the Three Perfections." The perfections I desired were rest, cleanliness and decent food, and of these not one was to be had, for a filthier, noisier place I have never seen, and even the tea was a disgusting decoction made with water from a source which I strongly suspected I had seen among the dung heaps in the yard. The rice was ill-boiled, the kang (a brick platform with a fire kindled beneath it where travellers sit) was heaped with the dirty rags of a party of travelling jugglers who had gone out to try to earn an honest penny to pay for their board and lodging. However, those who travel off the beaten track in China must be prepared for such discomforts and worse, and I surveyed it all with only the air of haughty contempt which gains so much consideration from Orientals, and called for the landlord. He was all obsequiousness, overwhelmed with shame that such a noble lord should be a guest of his inn just when unfortunate chances prevented its being the mirror of cleanliness that all the world knew it.

I waved that aside coldly.

"My stay will not be sufficiently long to occasion me inconvenience, and you shall be rewarded for any efforts made in my service. I desire to ask if this remote village is honoured by the presence of a sage named Shih?"

He looked surprised at the question, but bowed low.

"There is certainly a resident named Shih, but since he failed in his examinations, is it lawful, noble person, to regard him as a sage? His poverty also is great."

"The sages have not been remarkable for wealth," said I, "but rather for their contempt of it. Kindly send a servant to inquire if I may wait on this learned person. Inform him that my name is Wu Chen, a graduate of literature, and that if it be agreeable I am wishful to drink at the fountain of his information."

Promising obedience, he hurried off, leaving me to my attitude of distinguished calm, and presently I saw a tousle-headed servant making her way through the litter of the pig yard, where two donkeys also added to the rural charm by braying at the tops of their voices.

When she returned, the host himself offered to guide me, and we set out through the Village of the Aged Duck, squalid and wretched even for the poverty of some districts in China. Lean curs barked about us. Lean pigs scuffled for the possession of foods unmentionable to ears polite, naked children disputed it with them while half-naked, wisp-haired mothers spared scarcely a glance from their tumble-down doorways. It is pitiable to see so worthy a people as the Chinese, living as they do in a country of untapped riches, reduced to such straits by sheer misgovernment.

We waded and paddled through the filth as best we

could on enormous stepping-stones placed at such distances that it needed the spring of a chamois to leap from one to the other in safety. But we arrived, for presently a tumble-down house rose before us, with the decoration of a more tumble-down veranda in which I saw a man in a tattered gown writing.

"This is the shrine of the jewel you seek, noble lord," said the host of the inn, and, bowing almost to the earth, requested me to say whether it was my pleasure he should wait for me. I disclaimed the honour and went on alone.

I am bound to own that the shrewd intelligence of that man's face was astonishing. How he could have fallen into such poverty would have been an unanswerable riddle, if I had not seen the unmistakable opium look in his eyes and its effect in his shaking hands. He rose, however, with a manner beyond his surroundings, and offered me a seat, politely bowing and standing until I took it, and refusing to be seated himself until I had stated my business.

"I am informed," said I, "that your learning is not to be matched in China for its command of general information. Passing through the Village of the Aged Duck, it was impossible I should depart without a specimen of such skill, and I beg leave to present a few questions which will be the sport of a child to the profundities of your knowledge."

Poor wretch. I could hear the crying of many children, and the scolding of an angry woman in the back places of the house. His eyes fixed eagerly on my face.

"Little is known to this humble individual, but all is at your service, great person. What would you inquire?"

I had prepared a string of three or four questions to introduce the one that mattered.

"What is the distance in nautical miles between the ports of Shanghai and Bombay?"

It so happened I had heard a bet between two naval men in the club at Peking on this subject, and the figures were in my mind. To my utter amazement he thought an instant and answered perfectly correctly. I declare I was almost too surprised to collect my own thoughts for the next attempt.

However, I returned to the charge.

"What are the latitude and the longitude of the port of Sourabaya?"

He gave them immediately and correctly. I bowed and expressed my sincere astonishment at his gifts, and a faint pleasure appeared in his sallow face. I asked if he could tell me to what botanical genus the famous blue poppy of Tibet belonged. Without a moment's delay he answered that it was not a true poppy and gave me the Latin name.

Now came the crux.

"Supposing you had been told to ask the Thousand Wise Men for information, to which of the ancient sages would you go?"

"To none. To the Tara Lamasery of the Thousand Lamas. The Mingan Lamane Tara," he replied in the same breath. "There are more than a thousand now, but the ancient country folk still call it by that name. It is an ancient lamasery in Mongolia."

I dared not stop to digest the information. I merely said:

"I have heard of another institution of much the same name. Have I not entrapped your wisdom here?"

"By no means, my lord. Tara in the country of Mongolia is the abode of the Thousand Wise Men. The other is not now called by that name."

"Such wisdom," I said, "is overwhelming to the intellect. I will ask but one more question and depart in humility. In what country is the vegetable inscriber?"

I thought I had him then. But he was swift as lightning.

"In the country of Tibet is a tree whose leaves as they unfold are each inscribed with words in praise of the Exalted Saint Tsong-Kaba. This tree is found at the Lamasery of Kunboum and is known as the Tree of the Ten Thousand Images."

I was floored. Like the Queen of Sheba in similar case, I had no more spirit left in me. Besides, I had got what I wanted. I rose and bowed, saying:

"Learned Sir, in the whole Celestial Empire there cannot be your peer. The privilege of sitting at your feet is one that the greatest should desire. Accept an inadequate token of my esteem with the assurance that wherever I go your praises shall be loud on my tongue."

He was genuinely pleased, poor devil, apart from the substantial reward I laid on the rickety table, gracefully folded in paper. I saw his eyes seek it anxiously before he escorted me, bowing, to the rotten paling that hedged in his little domain. He protested volubly that I had asked him nothing difficult. If I would come again with high and searching questions he would do his best to justify my opinion.

Well, it was a curious business. Remarkable memories are common enough in China, but I think any one will admit that the questions I asked were unlikely ones for a Chinese village. There are queer characters in China, and strange professions if you know where to look. I heard much of this man afterward in various places. He had quite a fame of his own and was known as the "Solver of Secrets."

I got back to the Three Perfections, and through the miserable night, tormented by predatory insects and close, foul air, I considered my next move. The Tara Lamasery. I had heard the name, though never in connection with the Thousand, and I knew very well that it was across the prairie desert in northern Tartary. The more I thought of it, the more certain I felt it was exactly the place that the blind man's ancestor might have chosen for the hiding place of his share of Ho's treasure. None better in the world, if you knew the ropes, but a terrible business at that date and no means an easy one now. I must confess an exposition of sloth seized me for the moment. Sië had enough, and more than enough in the deposit at the Tiger's Den. Why not let the rest slide and await its appointed fate in times to come? But that mood did not last. If a man has set himself a task he must see it through, especially if it concerns another person and that person the woman he loves and is bound in honour to deliver from a hateful slavery.

I could not put myself in touch with the blind man that night, for I had no privacy and was obliged to sleep on the kang in company with the tired travelling jugglers,

or rather to wake and battle with the pests of air and earth.

I was thankful when the dawn came, and with its first glimmer I was up and on my way. A curious circumstance happened, however. As I made my way through the village, alternately hopping and springing, I beheld the learned Shih leaning disconsolately against his paling and looking more of a scarecrow than the day before, allowing even for the unbecoming dawn light. He greeted me with reverence, and I stopped a moment to pay a last compliment.

"Undeserved. Entirely undeserved!" he replied bowing. "As regards the honourable question as to the Thousand, it is singular that I was asked the same question lately."

"Indeed!" said I, stopping dead. "And by whom?"

"A young man of undistinguished appearance."

"Pray describe him. I may meet him some day."

"Surely, my lord, it is unlikely. Yet though the world contains untold millions, and the Shan-tsu desert be boundless, there Li Hung met with his mother-in-law. The young man was slight, black-haired and of pleasing appearance. He desired to become a lama there."

"His name?"

"Was not given, my lord. He thirsted for religious life in the wilds and inquired also about the Lamasery of the Five Towers. A harmless person. May a prosperous star conduct your journey to a prosperous close."

No more could I get and we parted. I had plenty to consider. The coincidence of that question seemed amazing and yet might easily be nothing, for the Tara

Lamasery is known to many in Peking though the old name is never used now.

The next night I got down to a hopeless little place—the Inn of Exalted Equity—in a village in a cleft of the hills not very far off Peking, and then, earning myself the name of a lunatic, I elected to sleep in an empty shed, clean and heaped with cornstalks, by a running stream, sooner than face the kang and the stagnant air inside. And so I secured nature and quiet, almost the two best things in the world to my taste.

I lay down at ten o'clock, looking at the moon through the place where the door should have been. She wore a more friendly face than her cold stare at the Temple of the August Peace, and the night was infinitely cool and sweet, and heavenly draughts were blowing about me.

I resolved that I would get in touch with my master somehow, anyhow, at the appointed hour. It was a quarter to ten, and if ever I made a resolution in this world it was to keep awake and communicate. But by ten o'clock I was dead asleep.

And then on winged feet came to me a dream—a very strange one!

I saw not my master, but Sië. She was standing behind the Empress's great chair, which was draped in the imperial yellow, and her arms were folded on its back and her head leaned on them as if in deep thought or prayer. She was alone. In the vagueness of a dream I did not know whether I was in the room with her or not. Only we were together, near and dear, as we had never been in life. She melted into my arms as dream people

do—was there suddenly, warm and sweet, looking up with eyes like moonlit wells of love—sweetest eyes were ever seen, I thought—and either she was speaking English or some language common to all the dwellers of dreamland, for her speech was as natural to me as my own.

"Darling," she said; "heart of my heart, do no more. Go no farther. Be satisfied as I am. It is enough—enough. Only disappointment beyond. Stay with me. Stay!"

And then her words dissolved in the liquid wordless music all lovers know, love interpreted in sound, in touch, in hearing, in the perfumed warmth of delicious hair, and eyelashes that brushed the lips with a caress, and breath as purely sweet as spring flowers—but who can speak of it? And then she drew herself apart and laughed like the crystal wind bells in the palace gardens.

"Bodies are such stupid things!" she said. "Yours is lying asleep by a stream in the field of the Inn of Exalted Equity, and I am dreaming at Hsian, and yet the real you holds the real me in his dear arms and we have cast aside the foolish peepholes of the five dull senses for the blind master's sight. I see your spirit, clear as you really are. And I—am I not beautiful?"

"Divinely sweet," I said, and looked and looked at the shining thing I held in my arms and could not be satisfied. Never was living woman so lovely fair. I could have looked for ever and desired no more. And yet, even then she fluttered softly, and slipped away and laughed at a distance—the elfin beauty!—and I saw her eyes like stars

in a cloud, and they vanished, and only a dream-distant voice said: "Stay with me. Stay with me, beloved," and died far off.

I slept after that in a depth of shadowy sleep that bathed and refreshed me like the darkness of deep water, and when I awoke I remembered every detail. But it was only a lover's dream, I thought. Nothing to influence a man except to greater love of the sweet spirit that fled to him across the night.

Certainly I never hesitated about going, and what I had found made me even keener to find the rest. I wanted to complete my work and lay it finished at her feet. Also I had the kind of pride that any man worth his name feels in putting his job through.

I got down into Peking three or four days later and made all my plans for the trek to the Land of Grass. The main route was not strange to me for part of the way, for, as I have said, I had spent two summers in Mongolia, but of the Tara district I knew nothing. Mongolia is a large order. A fascinating country, too, in its wild way —I had always meant to go again, though I never foresaw how it would come about. But I did not expect any difficulties. I could smatter away at the language. I am a born traveller among Orientals, and besides I should have a Mongol camel driver or two—plenty of them knocking about Peking. I put it through as quickly as I could in the disturbed state of affairs, and in less than a week my party was ready, four camels, a mule, two camel drivers and an awful-looking ruffian named Cheng as my servant, who had the kindest heart I ever knew under the roughest exterior.

I visited the friendly temple where I kept my various kits, in the forlorn hope of a word from the blind man, but there was nothing. A keen disappointment, for his silence since the "sending" at the Temple of the August Peace had got a bit on my nerves. There was so much in which I needed his counsel, and information was of the utmost importance. I wanted to know whether my fairy tale of the one-eyed priest had kept the Empress busy—I wanted to know a hundred things; and beyond and above all this I wanted news of Sië. Passionately, I thought of her night and day; but she, too, came no more in dream, and the nights were as empty as the days.

But for all these anxieties and the haste I had to make because of the coming winter, my run into Mongolia would have been a pleasant thing in its way. There was plenty to occupy the mind. Disbanded parties of Boxers were said to be roving about the Contiguous Defiles and beyond, which gave a spice of adventure. One knew exactly what that would be—just a variant on the good old brigand of those parts, who requests a loan of your purse with such polite address that if you have the brutality to refuse he really seems justified in resenting your rudeness with shot or cold steel. But I had made very effectual little preparations for this kind of attention, and did not anticipate trouble. We carried our own tents, for apart from the dirt and discomfort of the inns, when there happen to be any, it is just in these inns that you are watched by the gentry who will ambush you further along the route and slit your throat with as little compunction as they would a pig's.

To me Mongolia is one of the most fascinating coun-

tries in the world. A strange, dry land of desert, mountain and endless prairie, of frightful heat in summer, of devastating cold in winter. But a wizard land, also, of most sinister beauty and wild desolation, where the mountains burn with metallic colour as if glowing hot from the work of infernal smiths in the abyss, and the vast lakes and rushing rivers are sublime in loneliness. And, in these wild solitudes the very religion of the Lord Buddha has lost its peace and reverie and has become terrible in aspect from its blending with the original devil worships of the Tartar peoples, and is now a medley of strange reincarnated gods and saints, human deities who dwell in their secret but densely populated lamaseries, wielding magical powers which alternately terrify and charm the roaming tribes who believe in them so devoutly.

There is no country in the world so dominated by religion as Mongolia, if it be not Tibet. Every action, every thought of every man and woman is swayed by the lamas and their teachings. In every yurta (tent) of these nomad peoples is the altar of their faith. In every sickness, death, birth, marriage, the lamas must be there to work their charms and summon the kindly spirits and dismiss the dangerous. And the evil spirits are the more numerous. Who could doubt that in seeing the face nature turns here upon her children? Life is so small a thing here and death so near, so terrible. What wonder if they make their humble offerings to propitiate the dark Unseen?

And to one of these great and marvellous lamaseries I was bound with my own little load of hop and fears.

What should I find there of wild and melancholy and dangerous to meet me? There was an augury of dark things in my own heart, which I set down to the many dangers past rather than to those yet to come.

CHAPTER XIV

I PASS over the first part of my trek. Any one who knows Peking has seen the strings of camels leaving by the frowning pyramidal gates for the wilds, and a romantic sight it is until it becomes an everyday experience.

So I struck north and west, following the well-worn trade route at first, and left civilization behind me. If it were not spinning too long a yarn an interesting book might be made of the adventures of such a life, for, so far from being lonely, except of course later on, one certainly meets as queer a collection of human beings as anywhere in the universe: Trading Chinese with bland, enigmatic faces and greedy souls beneath, the blood-suckers of the simple Mongol people who once ruled China itself through their great khans; lamas journeying to and from the great Lama Temple at Peking; Mongols chasing their wild horses on the prairies; camel and horse caravans carrying every sort of goods to the great mart of the Far East.

Every language I knew or smattered was in requisition many times a day at first, for in the earlier stages a scattered Englishman, Frenchman or Russian would turn up smiling among the natives. But I was chary with my English, as became a Chinese, and my French is bad enough to pass anywhere as an Oriental effort.

There is no life like the life of the open road. To this

day I would rather see a Mongol yurta than a king's palace.

We had been out about a month and were trekking through the sandy steppes when we overtook an old lama pacing gravely along the track on a sturdy little horse. These men, owing to their religious character, can travel alone in safety where it would be madness for others to venture, for the Mongols would guard them with their lives, and the Chinese, who are quite uninterested in poverty, knowing their pockets are empty, seldom trouble themselves to look their way.

He greeted us kindly and asked permission to join us for part of the journey, and this, a common civility of the road, I granted at once. He drew up beside me and began talking volubly. Where was I for? He was on the way to his own lamasery, having seen the frightful events in Peking from the safe shelter of the Lama Temple. He had had enough of the great world, he said, and never would leave the wilds again.

"There is peace. A man rises in the morning, and expects to lay his head down in safety at night. You, my brother, are you also fleeing from the bloody terror?"

"No, holy person. I journey on pilgrimage to the Lamasery of Tara, but I shall return when business calls me."

"You are then a follower of the Excellent One in his various incarnations and manifestations."

"I salute the Excellent One with profound reverence."

"It is well. Then the company of this humble servant of the Faith will not displease you. The Lamasery of Tara is my home and there I also am bent. Very won-

derful powers are vouchsafed to the Hubilgan of the Lamasery of Tara. He is, as you know, a reincarnate Buddha."

"So I have heard. Also that wisdom is the heritage of the lamas of Tara, and therefore the Mongols call it the Abode of the Thousand Wise Men."

"That also is true, worthy stranger. A whole class of our brothers are devoted to the study of the science of marvels, another to planetary lore, and a third to herbal. Half the simples used by our brothers throughout Mongolia are compounded at the Lamasery of Tara."

"I promise myself much instruction there, and propose to make offerings testifying my respect for the Sacred Manifestation."

I thought it as well to make this statement, wishing to pass as a person of consideration, to whom it would be worth while to be civil.

He looked at me with surprise.

"Worthy person, this wisdom is not bought or sold. You cannot suppose that a living Buddha is influenced by gifts or gold?"

"Far be such a thought from me. Yet the Excellent One himself did accept the gift of a garden and monastery for his order."

This reference was graciously received, and we rode a while in silence.

"Of what age is His Holiness the living Buddha," I asked at last.

"He is now sixty-four years old and replete with wisdom. He recalls all the events of all his previous incar-

nations at will, and for this reason there is no historical circumstance dark to him, and this has caused frequent embassies to be sent him from the reigning dynasties in Peking, both the Mings and the Manchus, that they may benefit by his advice and experience."

I turned this over in my mind. Ridiculous, the up-to-date Westerner will say. A man must be a lunatic to attach any importance to the ravings of a heathen. Let me assure the up-to-date Westerner that he has a lot to learn and unlearn, and a few months' tourist tripping in the Far East will do very little for him in either respect. Only those know the wonders of the Orient who have lived among the people many years, and with sympathy and knowledge. So, knowing a little, I went on with my questions.

"Does His Holiness recall all the dealings of the Lamasery with the Court of Peking?"

"Certainly, and His Holiness is very approachable and gracious to those who seek information. Great confidence has been reposed in him by the mighty, in this and previous incarnations."

This set me thinking deeply. It occupied my mind through heat and cold, and visits to Mongol yurtas, and queer half-Chinese, half-Tartar towns, where an adventure befell me that I may write one day. Was it possible that the Hubilgan held the direct secret of the treasure? Would the blind man's ancestor have committed it to the charge of any man and above all an ecclesiastic with the interests of his own lamasery to consider? And what would be my chances of success if I claimed it as the

agent of the rightful heir? And how long would the news take to reach the Empress, and what then would Sië's chance of life or my own be worth?

These were interesting questions, and were often the unseen groundwork of my talks with the Peking lama, as I called him; but friendly as he was I could get nothing else useful from him.

But we became very friendly as we journeyed on together and I was glad of a companion with something more of education and insight than my drivers and servant. He, in his turn, was grateful for the little comforts I could provide and he shared my tent and fire, and told me in return many strange tales of the life in the Lamasery of Tara and the magic powers of the Holy Hubilgan who ruled it. Some I believed, some I put aside as superstition. I would judge for myself when the time came. But one thing became very clear to me, though nothing was directly said on that point, namely, that great political movements were germinating in the lamaseries in the wilds, and that if I kept my eyes open and my mouth shut I might carry back news to the blind man of the first importance concerning the disposition of the Powers in Mongolia who sway the march of the Banner Men (the armed Mongol tribes)—a matter which might be of the first moment when the great Day he looked forward to should come.

We had a trifling brush with a roving band, and, whether they were Boxers or no, they gave us a wakeful night, and might have done some mischief if I had not been prepared.

We had seen some men scouting on horses during the

day, but paid no attention, thinking they were the ordinary riders of the prairies. But, when we had all turned in and were sleeping soundly, a little Mongol boy came creeping in by the door flap and timidly touched the lama.

"Man of prayer, holy lama, wake! There is danger!" he whispered and was gone like a dream. I waked to see the lama at the tent door looking toward the east with keen expectation quite unmixed with alarm.

"Worthy traveller, make ready. My people have seen a party of Kitats (Chinese) approaching from the east, and there is trouble."

There was, but not of a very accentuated nature; a few shots, and it was all over, and I should not mention it but for two reasons. First, the delightful attitude of the lama, who, though forbidden by his faith to shed blood, was most helpfully active up to the very point of letting fly at the foe, and as keen as any of us that we should wing the quarry; and second, the very curious fact that from a paper we found on the body of one of the two men we killed, it was certain they were in the employment of Yu Hsien, not only an ardent patron of the Boxers, but high in the favour of the Empress—in fact one of her right-hand men. I thought nothing of this at the time, but it recurred to me later.

I shall never forget the day when we came in sight of the great lamasery. It impressed me as few other places ever have done. There had been a tremendous thunderstorm with all the artillery of heaven let loose upon us and a deluge to follow that left us mere pulp. The camels were wading and slipping in mud very distasteful

to their feelings, which they relieved by the queer cries peculiar to their queer natures, and only the lama's horse and the little mule held gallantly on through rock and mud and stream. But suddenly the sun shot radiant beams through the clouds, and a magnificent rainbow spanned the way before us. The lama, overjoyed, raised his hand to heaven and cried: "It is the welcome of the Hubilgan to his faithful returning disciple. Lift up your eyes, worthy traveller. We have reached the Lamasery of Tara."

We rounded a corner and before us on a hill, well wooded and watered, were many great buildings, surrounded with numberless small huts, painted or washed a clean white. Three handsome temples centred the buildings, rising high to pagoda-shaped towers with gilded pinnacled roofs. And behind these sprang a sheer cliff, a great part of the face of it worked into niches where sat or stood strange gods and goddesses like giant bees in a giant honeycomb, but painted brilliant colours. So they stared over the countryside, visible a long way off. In these wilds and among the trees the effect was really beautiful, and the little town, clustering about them, had a religious air because its population consisted almost entirely of lamas, pilgrims who arrived being obliged to camp on the plain outside. I, however, being introduced by the Peking lama, who spoke of me in much handsomer terms than I deserved, was given a hut with a place adjoining for my servant, and was at once invited to pay my devotions in the chief temple. It was easy to see one was in a town devoted to religion, for at every bend of

the beautiful stream that watered it were fixed praying wheels without number, turning in the rush of the water, and thus incessantly repeating their mystic invocation to the Jewel in the Lotus. The barrel prayer-wheels stood everywhere, also, and many lamas were grinding industriously at these heavenly labour-saving machines. Before us in the street the young lamas from other parts were performing the curious rite by which one encircles a lamasery in a series of prostrations. They rose, then laid themselves flat on the ground, forehead touching it, arms spread before it with the hands joined. In each hand was a horn which was drawn back in a curve until the hands touched the side. Then they rose and repeated the prostration until the whole circuit of the lamasery was made. And anything like the exhaustion of these poor creatures I have seldom seen. Mongolian Buddhism certainly takes its dogmas seriously.

I visited the temple in company with the Peking lama and several of my new friends—a place of much splendour with its hanging brocades and glittering images and altars crowded to suffocation with sacred objects. I was escorted then to my own little abode which my servant had made habitable enough, and a plate of raisins and fruit was offered me by my hosts.

"Elder brother, rest here in peace," said the spokesman in excellent Chinese. "In peace perform your devotions and receive the blessing of the Holy Hubilgan."

"May I humbly inquire of what deity His Holiness is the reincarnation?"

"The Buddha of Infallible Magic. Very great are the

marvels His Holiness can perform. The pilgrims are now gathering to see a sacred miracle which takes place to-morrow."

"Then I cannot have the honour of paying my respects to the Holy Hubilgan until afterward?"

"Certainly not. But there can be no doubt of your favourable reception later."

I was then left to rest, and after a sound meal and sounder sleep, I went forth to examine the amazing place in which I found myself.

Lamas, lamas everywhere! More than half the population in Mongolia are lamas. They swarmed; some dwellers in the lamasery, some nomads upon the face of the earth, but all of the religious community. I talked with many who could understand my tongues, but many shook their heads and passed on repellent. From none did my cautious feelers gain any information as to my errand. Indeed every mind was occupied with the coming miracle. All day at intervals the great conches bellowed, calling the religious into the temples where solemn services were held with rosaries and holy water and the chanting of strong male voices. The lamas crowded in in hundreds, in their praying shawls, robed in brown, red, or yellow according to their degrees. It was impressive to a degree. I stood outside tense with excitement, where I could look into the dim rich interior, cloudy with incense, crowded, magical, dim, the images of the deities glimmering faintly. No one would tell me what the miracle was to be. Perhaps they did not know. But the laity would be admitted to see it, and the camps of pilgrims were forming thick on the plains outside the little

town—the tents rising like huge balloons into the air.

Magic! I had often heard of the magic of the lamas and with intense curiosity. I was very sure it would have nothing in common with the high spiritual teachings of my master. All I had heard was surrounded with terror and mystery. None the less interesting for that.

CHAPTER XV

THE scene next morning was astonishing. In brilliant weather, men, women and children were pouring into the place from every direction of the compass and riding on every sort of animal known to Mongolia. Where they were all to be accommodated, I could not think, and was turning this over in my mind when the Peking lama came up and solved the riddle.

"In the great court of the temple the miracle will be shown, noble guest. Come now with me that you may secure a good place for the very sight ensures blessings."

We hurried along for all we were worth for the crowd was already pouring in through the great gates—a really wonderful sight in the setting of the blue-tiled Chinese roofs with the gilt dolphins and dragons on the corners.

We pushed along with the stream, and the Peking lama's authority, aided by vigourous thrusts with his arms and legs, got me into the front row.

An extraordinary sight. At the end of the great court an altar was raised and around it in a semicircle sat the principal lamas in solemn silence. When the crowd had made its way in the gates were shut and the great conches bellowed with a deafening clamour that was echoed back to us by the mountains. They ceased. Then, in a silence where you might have heard a breath, the Holy Hubilgan appeared from the temple, attended by six Gelungs, or high lamas, wearing the five-leafed tiaras used

in worshipping the Eight Terrible Ones. The reincarnated saint wore a very high conical cap with inscribed ribbon appendages falling on his breast. His face was pale and ascetic, the eyes very black and piercing in spite of their Mongolian setting, and the jaw prominent and resolute. What I could see of the hair was snow white. An imposing figure, very still and stately. Ascending steps at the back, he climbed to the altar, looked before him for a moment, and then quietly composed himself into a sitting position, raised his hand, and the invocations began.

The six Gelungs uttered a deep-throated chant, and at every pause the assembled lamas thundered a response until the sonorous waves of sound beat against the brain almost to terror. The Gelungs chanted quicker, the response grew louder, fiercer—it grew until, like the paralysing roar of the lion, it seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere in a frightful crescendo that culminated in a deafening outburst, and stopped so suddenly that the silence was as awful as the sound. The Hubilgan raised his hand to the sky and all the assembly stared upward into the stainless azure, and as we looked a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand formed itself. It spread like the rush of a black-winged bird, the sun was obscured, rain fell furiously, continuous like crystal rods. Half the people sprang to their feet to rush into shelter, but the lamas awed them down, and even as they did so the Hubilgan waved his hand, the cloud vanished like a dream, the sun shone glorious, and where the rain had fallen was no wet at all.

Amazing! No use to talk of coincidence. I had read

this thing in the travels of Marco Polo and elsewhere, little thinking I should ever see it as an accomplished truth. But I was prepared—I had learned a little from the blind man of how the senses may be used by those in possession either of the sacred or idle secret—the first which opens the eyes to things as they really are, the second which opens them to what the magician would have them believe. It would be interesting to discover which this was. I prepared for the test, girding up my resolution.

For the next—a great brass cauldron filled with water was set at the end of the great court at the farthest distance from the Hubilgan. It would contain several gallons. While the invocations to the Eight Terrible Ones were renewed, stunning our senses into a kind of quiescence, he raised his hand again. It was too far off for me to see exactly what happened, but I saw the crowd drawing back to either side with a kind of hissing shudder of fear. They made a clear way, hustling back on each other. Then, turning and half rising, I saw a stream of water round and distinct as a snake passing along the hard trampled ground between them. Overflowing from the rim of the great vessel it was obeying the signal of the Hubilgan, and was flowing *up* the grade of the court to the altar. I cannot tell why, but that simple violation of a fundamental law impressed me more than the first.

The Hubilgan made an arresting sign and the water stopped obedient, collecting on itself by the flow from behind until it stood like a block of ice. He beckoned again and it flowed steadily on to the thundering roar of the chant of male voices. I saw a woman dip a cloth

in it and press it to her lips—many followed her. As it passed I dipped my own hand and the clear drops ran from my fingers. The water flowed on to the foot of the altar and was gone. The cauldron was empty.

A long, heaving sigh broke from the multitude.

I find it difficult to describe the condition of my brain as I saw these wonders in glaring daylight. The sonorous chanting, the passionate emotion of the crowd, the white dominating face, the convulsive tremors of the chanting lamas—swaying from side to side—how can a man escape the contagion that makes the very air an accomplice in what he sees or thinks he sees? I felt the blood rush to my head, the nerves tingled along my spine as if living things crept there. With difficulty I steadied myself.

Then amid the terrible invocations one of the Gelungs rose and tendered a long knife to the Hubilgan. He put aside the robe about his shoulders, bared his breast to below the waist, exposing the abdomen, and with two swift cross cuts of the knife, performing what is known in Japan as the hara-kiri. I saw the blood pouring in a crimson flood. I saw—but no, these things are not for words—the sobbing multitude flung themselves on their faces, and one of the Gelungs, rising, advanced to the foot of the altar. Like one man, the lamas ceased chanting. The man standing before the altar spoke loudly. In the dead silence came question and answer:

"Holy One, tell us of our country. What is her doom?"

An awful voice from the awful bleeding figure replied:

"A great doom. From this country like a lit lamp

shall the Yellow Faith enlighten the world. The White Faith wanes before it like a moon at dawn."

"Holy One, what of the Manchu dynasty that has stolen our land and oppressed us?"

"Already it dies. The breath is in its nostrils and a wise man twists the sword in its wound."

"Holy One, shall the white people wane, and their faith wither and Asia triumph?"

"She shall triumph."

"Holy One, is the day of our triumph at hand?"

"In fourteen summers shall the beginning be seen on the earth, and the Empire of Oros (Russia) totter into ruin."

(Remember it was in the year 1900 that I heard this prophecy.)

"Holy One, we have heard. Return to us from the gates of death. Return!"

And again the wild invocations broke out like a tempest.

Then suddenly strength of purpose came to me. I extricated myself from the torrent of emotion as a man may wade to dry land from the sea. I clenched my hands and repeated the formula given me by the blind man for such occasions as this. I must not give it to the uninitiated. I will simply say it is called the "Charm of the Cleansing of the Eyes," and that as I repeated it inwardly I saw the Hubilgan seated calm and unwounded on the altar, swathed in his robes, untouched, serene and collected, while the multitude screamed and sobbed before him. I saw the rigid faces of the six Gelungs, the enlightened, who saw the scene in its reality even as I did. To all this I can swear. It is the truth. He was

using the amazing power known in India and the Far East for ages to compel hundreds, nay, thousands, of spectators to see the picture formed in one man's mind. Who shall talk of the power and trustworthiness of the senses after this? Who shall say that seeing is believing?

Then I released myself. I sprang, as it were, into the ocean of illusion again that I might see the thing to the end.

The lamas began a very soft intoning. The Peking lama whispered that it was "The Formula of Return," very quiet, like a far-off music sung with shut lips. The Hubilgan, now almost drained of blood, which dripped on all sides from the altar, raised some in his right hand and breathed upon it three times, then, with a loud and terrible cry, flung it into the air. He passed his hand over the cross-cut and gaping wound, and as he did so, it closed, the flesh contracted, the skin resumed its natural colour. The wound was gone. The crowd on its knees watched the marvel.

Then drawing his robe about him with no trace remaining of what had been done, he sat, death-white and still, on the altar and imparted his blessing to all present, and finally, leaning on two Gelungs, he stepped down slowly and disappeared into the temple, and the people pressed forward to secure some token of the sacred blood that still dripped from the altar.

I broke away from the Peking lama and climbed up into the woods overhanging the temples, and there tried to adjust my mind and draw my conclusions. I have drawn them long since and that sight would not now

move me to any emotion, least of all to that of surprise. Let the West prattle of mass hynotism, let it in its ignorance discuss the subconscious self and its powers, and when it has exhausted conjecture, let it sit at the feet of the Orient and learn the old knowledge that was hoary with the wisdom of ages when Moses studied the wisdom of the Egyptians. And then will come the inevitable end. The West will apply it to its own inappeasable thirst for gold and power, and the world will go down in ruin.

So I say no more. I spent that day alone. The next I was summoned to the presence of the Holy Hubilgan.

I was led by endless passages with endless doors opening from them to a wider one which ended in a golden door richly embossed with symbols of dragons and sacred figures apparently controlling them. The Peking lama who was my guide knocked very low three times, and then opened it. I saw his long yellow hand trembling as he did so, and when it opened he threw himself on the floor inside and so remained through our whole interview. And now what I tell will not be believed, yet is true.

The Holy Hubilgan was seated alone in a great room pierced with only two small windows and therefore very dim. Before him was a low table of carved Chinese blackwood. His face was death-pale, and, in a setting white as snow, gleamed his strange eyes like glittering black jewels, magnetic, piercing, terrifying. My heart seemed to open like the valves of a shell to disclose its secrets when he turned them slowly on me. He wore a white robe folded about him, the cushions he sat on were

white. In the dimness of the room, he cast a pale light about him like a ghost, a memory taking shape for a brief moment between life and death. On his long slender hand was a great barbaric ring with a green gem deep as fathomless water.

A cold vibrant thrill ran through every vein as I met the intricate eyes that slowly widened on me from this living image of ivory. I made my humble salutation, and instantly in a clear voice he said in English:

"You deny your country. But you are an Englishman. What is your reason?"

I could not have spoken to save my life. It took me so utterly by surprise. Was I dreaming? English! But I collected my mind hurriedly. Who could know what language he was talking? I only knew that I heard it as English. The blind man had prepared me here, as in so much else.

"You own you are English?"

"I own it."

"Your name?"

"John Mallerdean."

He looked calmly at me.

"Your ancestor was a man of note in the days of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, a hundred and more years ago. I remember him well. Black-haired and eyed like you, with straight black brows. A fierce, proud man. He came here twice on an errand from the Court at Peking."

"And Your Holiness saw him?"

"I saw him. What have I not seen in the rolling of the Wheel of birth and death?"

"Then Your Holiness knows for what I have come?"

It seemed impossible to fence with this wonderful person. I threw up my hands, so to speak.

"I know. You have come for the treasure of Ho. The secret was deposited here by the ancestor of the Blind Man of Hupei."

For a moment I think I hardly knew what I was about. What use was human planning against this diamond-clear searchlight of knowledge?

"Does Your Holiness know my master?" I said at last.

"In the flesh, no. Otherwise, yes. He is a mighty master, a fountain of the high wisdom, a great initiate."

"Then, since I am his disciple, will Your Holiness believe that I do not seek this treasure with evil thoughts, but for its rightful owner?"

"The story is known to me. I made incantations the night you came here. We know the business of all who come. You seek it for a young Manchu woman whom you will if possible marry. She is the descendant of Ho Shen, the servant of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung."

How could I speak? And this was the man I had hoped to sift with my clever questions—to pick his brains unknown to him! He went on serenely.

"You have found a part of the treasure, but you will not find the rest. It is disposed of."

I could only stare at him. I caught at a chair near me and rested my weight upon it. His expression never changed. It might have been a statue unlocking marble lips. But Sië—Sië had warned me in a dream. "Disappointment only!" she had said. Was I disappointed? My brain was swimming so wildly that honestly I did not know myself.

"Since you are the disciple of your great master, I will tell you certain facts from the Book of Celestial Secrets where the future and the past are unfolded. Others must be hidden until their due time. His ancestor came here, and, taking counsel with me, buried the treasure in the ruined city of Karakorum where once all the peoples of Asia and many of Europe met under the sceptre of Genghis Khan the Conqueror. It was securely hidden. None could find it but with the password of the Thousand Wise Men of Tara. Then he left me to meet the doom which I foretold to him. A brave man, and a great rebirth awaits him. When you return to the blind man ask him where the treasure is and he will tell you."

"Then Your Holiness recalls that event?"

"Why not? To me it is an event of yesterday. Do I not remember the day when Genghis Khan placed this jewel on my hand many centuries ago?" He pointed to the green gleam on his thumb, then went on:

"Have you marvelled why the crafty Empress keeps the Manchu girl always about her? I will tell you. She is her granddaughter. Her father was the great nobleman Chi Ching, of the line of Ho. His father was the lover of the Empress in her youth. The Old Buddha keeps her as a pledge for the treasure of Ho if ever it should be found, for of his family there is no other. But when it is found she will surely slay her, as she slew that lady's father, who was her own son."

Blinding flashes of light burst in upon me. So this was the secret—a State secret of the deepest—and it accounted for all I had seen and much that I had dimly guessed. Sië, of that great Manchu blood—Sië of the

sweet eyes! I trembled before the magnitude of the knowledge. But I collected myself.

"With a most grateful heart I thank Your Holiness. What can be hidden from such wisdom? I am abashed before it. Yes, I would wed her. What more can I say?"

"She is pure gold. There is no spot nor stain in her and her mother was a great lady—a lotus of the Perfect One. She would not outlive her lord. If men must love, so they should choose. But go back now and say this to the Blind Man of Hupei from the Holy Hubilgan of Tara: 'You have done well and according to your great wisdom. The Manchu is doomed. You, passing upward in your next reincarnation, shall see Asia rising like the sun at dawn, mighty and terrible. And this treasure of Karakorum, though lost to the Lady Sië, is not all lost, for we judged it best not to offend those who came for it and we have laid a great and terrible curse on the jewels that they shall do our work for us.' Say to the Blind Man: 'It has gone where Ho Shen would have wished. Your wisdom has discerned where.' And now I have said, depart in peace and swiftly, for your cunning that you thought wisdom has put this Sië in peril of her life. Therefore, go."

In my agony there were questions I burned to ask and dared not. Was the future a page open before those terrible glittering eyes? But no man dares question the Holy Hubilgan save only in the open multitude of the miracle. When he wills he speaks. Not otherwise.

He willed. In my heart he saw the longing.

"You ask: 'Dare I question the reincarnated Bud-

dha?' You dare not, but he will answer. You will not be too late. Also, you will rise to high things. Sorrow mingled with joy, pain with peace. But the peace is eternal and the pain passes. Your eyes are open to the Law of Life and Death, and in the evil days to come you shall not flinch."

He flung his hand outward and I saw, through rolling clouds of mist, a great plain, trenched and wired, heaped with the bodies of men in grey, in faded blue, in dust colour. Smoke blew about it, strange shapes rode the air like giant birds of prey. I put my hands before my face and it was gone. The dim walls confronted me.

"You have seen. It is the birth of Asia. The death of Europe. Go."

I knelt before him—who could do otherwise?—and he lifted the thin hand with the ring and muttered what I could not understand. For in the fear of that vision I had lost hold of the cord of communion, if I may so put it, and suddenly his speech was strange to me.

These men have the power to *think* understanding to you, and it seems to take the form of the speech you know best. That is all I can say.

I rose, retreating backward to the door and looking back saw him still, an image of ivory his hand propping his chin, with weird eyes darkening on the future.

The Peking lama gathered himself together and crawled to the door and closed it after us. Not a word did he say as we trod silently along the passages. Then, when we reached more common ground—

"Is your soul dead within you, noble guest? The Holy Hubilgan did not speak. Was he angry?"

"He spoke to my soul. Venerable lama, will you have my servants warned that I leave with the dawn? The beasts must be prepared."

"Your will shall be done."

I sat alone all that day considering what I had heard and seen. The place was terrifying, and yet, though I say it myself, I am no coward. It was not the magic. It was the sense of great events brooding overhead like thundercloud and presently to rain ruin on the world, of uncontrollable powers wielded by men with aims entirely mysterious and indecipherable. Nor was I cheered by an evening with the Peking lama and two of the Gelungs who had assisted at the miracles. For, ignorant that I was a European, these men spoke freely of the prophecies current in Tibet and Mongolia, to which the Holy Hubilgan had dimly alluded in the presence of the people.

These predictions have been known for more than a century. They are familiar to every Mongolian and Tibetan and these people speak of them with no doubt whatever of their fulfilment. The Chinese in those two countries know them in every detail.

A reincarnated Buddha will be born in the mountains to the north of Lhassa. While he remains there, preparing for the great work by fasting and devotions, the faith taught by the Buddha will weaken and dwindle throughout the nations who hold it. At this time the Chinese will gain influence in Tibet, but they cannot hold it. There will be a great massacre of the Chinese. After, under the command of the reincarnated Buddha of Tashi-Lumpo, the peoples of Central and Far Eastern Asia arise.

They will march on the West, and victory will follow their flags. India, Russia, will be the first to succumb, but the rest of the nations will follow. The reincarnated Buddha will be sovereign of the world, and the Yellow Faith be supreme.

Now, it is easy to laugh at these predictions. A hundred years ago one might have done so at one's ease, but it is a different matter to-day. Writing from the standpoint of 1923, twenty-three years later than the events I chronicle, I say that in the weakening and dissensions of the White Powers there is terrible acceleration of the deep and surging unrest of Asia. I say that the Japanese-Russian War, with its result, appeared to millions of throbbing hearts in Mongolia and Tibet to sound the dirge of the old superiorities and the birth cries of the new. And I say that such predictions, reinforced by such miracles as I have described, and passionately believed by these peoples, carry their own fulfilment with them. And I ask any man to look dispassionately at the weakening of the barriers in Europe, and to remember that the hordes of the Tartar and Mongol tribes once overran the world from Poland to Hindustan, from Constantinople to the China Sea, from Korea to the Ganges, and that their descendants founded the great Moghul Empire in India which lasted until the English wrested it from them. Let another Genghis Khan or Tamerlane rise again, and history will repeat itself with a vengeance.

These men talked far into the night and I listened with fixed attention. They, at least, believed every word they uttered. I can see now the small room, the three fanatic

faces, the lean yellow hands gesticulating as they drove their points home. These people lived in the future. They believed to the uttermost in the powers of their reincarnated Lamas and Hubilgans, and it is such beliefs as this which have conquered the world and will again.

CHAPTER XVI

I LEFT the Tara Lamasery next day, making what speed I could for Peking, and seeing very little on the way, for I was engrossed with what had happened and what was to come, and fear for Sië was my spur.

At the Lamasery of the Five Towers, where I stopped for the night, news reached me that the Court had returned to Peking, the Old Buddha in highest spirits and certain of her ability to set the Allies by the ears and profit by their divisions.

"She has plenty of cunning," said the young lama who gave me the news. "She has just the amount of cleverness that enables her to destroy. But she cannot build. The Manchus have never done that since the days of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, and now in their fall they are dragging China with them. So much the better for Mongolia!"

Again the predictions. I rode on, heavy of heart, wondering whether I should present myself at the palace in the Forbidden City, and how I should explain myself to the Empress. My faith in my master steadied me.

One night, in the Lamasery of Chorchi, I put myself in touch with my master for all I was worth. I had tried many times and failed—I suppose owing to my mental preoccupation. There were other conversations on the telephone! And my own folly stood between us also.

I looked out first into the night: a wild moon with scudding clouds with the sharp snowclad peaks black against it—a wild and lamentable country. Two young men sitting outside my window, in spite of the sprinkling of snow, were singing the national song of Timur the Tartar; for though the lamasery is in Shansi many of the men about it are Tartars and Mongolians. It was a wild and melancholy air, but with warlike fire shooting through it in the fierce drumming repetitions.

"When the divine Timur (Tamerlane) dwelt in our tents
The nation was warlike.
Their look made the peoples tremble.
Return, O Timur, we await thee.
We live in our vast plains, where is the chief to lead us?
Return, O Timur, we await thee.
We are ready. The Mongols are afoot, O Timur.
And do thou, great Lama, send down victory on our lances!
Return, return, O Timur!"

Tamerlane the Terrible, the Lame Conqueror! That also gave me to think. The zest with which they sang it, the ardent faces and voices in the icy winter moon were ominous.

I waited until they had gone off, and then with more effort than ever yet, lay down in the shifting moonlight and waited.

I knew it would come. A light mist spinning itself from invisible threads of moonlight rose before my eyes. It filled everything, even my thoughts, with confusion. I focussed on a spot of whirling light in the middle, and that, spinning like a screw, flung the mist aside and made

way for the picture— My master, sitting in the room I knew so well in the palace. The trees, now deflowered of their rosy blossom, were outside the window. He sat with his white keen face set toward me.

"Come, come here!" the urgent message reached me. "Have no fear. Come." He raised his hand and beckoned. And the light whirled again, regathering the mist, and the whole picture was resolved into the night.

I went forward after that with more certainty, and reached Peking early in January. The Court had only just settled in, and the people were bubbling with stories of the Empress's effective entrance and how well she had played up to the foreign gallery.

"Trust the Old Buddha's wisdom. She always sees her way. There is not a man in the Empire to be compared to her. She commanded that Europeans should be allowed to be present at her entry and specially saluted them. She will trap them yet, given time!" So said the Court party. That was the note, and those who detested the Manchu dynasty were lying low. It saddened me to see it.

Once more the Hakka disciple Yuan, I went into the Forbidden City fearlessly and asked to see Li Lien-ying. I was kept waiting just long enough to impress me with his importance, and then he came swaggering in, his slit secret eyes fixed on the floor and only shooting a glance at me now and then—hateful in his womanly headdress.

"Distinguished counsellor of princes, is the Blind Man of Hupei here? I have returned to present my duty to the Empress and to attend him once more if it be her will."

"The will of the Benevolent Mother is always kindly. What is the sage without his disciple? I am charged to conduct your wisdom straight to the foot of the throne, where you will meet him. Condescend to follow."

I saw the game at once. We were not to meet, not to have the chance of exchanging a word, before we met in the Empress's presence. She would test my master's counsels and visions by my replies. What intrigued me beyond measure was what she herself had been doing in the meantime—how had she followed up the wild-goose chase I had set her on.

We went by the well-known ways, Li Lien-ying leading, massive in his mulberry silk and gold robe, stiff with clouds and dragons. He moved like a sleek, velvet-pawed cat—all silence.

The bitter chill of winter was in the wide hall as he opened the door, and I made the kowtow and crawled in. My master knelt before the chair, but that was not my first thought. *She* stood behind it—her dear face pale with cold, her eyes fixed steadily on me as I crawled my way up. Not a very dignified position for a lover, but less to her eyes than to mine. For I know that if I were an outcast, ragged and homeless, those eyes would still follow me with faithful love and worship. The Empress Consort stood, as usual, by the Empress's side.

I had never seen the Empress look better or younger. She had a fresh colour, her eyes were bright, all her gestures vivid and energetic. She was dressed in the old splendour with chain upon chain of pearls on her bosom, and was brimful of hope and success. No longer

weighed down with difficulties, but arrogant and confident, her old despotic self. I foresaw trouble.

I made my prostrations and knocked my head thrice on the floor, and then ventured a brief salutation of peace to my master, who returned it.

"Faithful disciple, we welcome you," said her Majesty. "Many and great events have happened since you went out like the autumn swallow on your journey. Let your tongue now rejoice us with the glad tidings acquired."

"Sacred sovereign, I will be brief and truthful, as becomes a worm before the Throne. On leaving you I wandered long in search of the temple of your vision and of the one-eyed priest, and I sought for tidings of the man who in Tai-Yuan had recognized the jade dragon, and I could hear nothing."

Her eyes narrowed and glinted. She shot a glance aside at Li Lien-ying. I went on:

"So then, by a chance hint that reached me and upon which I concentrated all my powers, I became aware that a servant of Ho had been entrusted with a great charge—even the concealment of his master's treasure. Later he had met his doom at the will of the Son of Heaven, and no torture could wring from him where it was hidden—so great is the obstinacy of the wicked! But I knew that a rumour had reached certain ears that he had confided his secret to 'The Thousand Wise Men,' and what this meant I could not tell."

She was listening now with fixed attention. The other two also. Sië looked only at the ground.

"Then after many days, and in great despair, I heard

of an intelligent graduate skilled in answering questions and to him I went, and after certain questions designed to test him and hide my purpose, I asked him who were 'The Thousand Wise Men,' and he answered that this was the ancient and little known name of the Tara Lamasery in the Land of Grass. What then was I to do?"

"You should have returned and laid that question before the Throne."

"Sacred Majesty, such was my will, but in condescension to this entirely humble one remember that it was then past mid-October, that time was precious, for the winter makes hard travelling in the Land of Grass, and that I feared lest any should be beforehand with me."

The Empress smiled almost imperceptibly. Then:

"You are forgiven, wise disciple. Proceed."

"So, through the chills, rains and snow I made my way to the Tara Lamasery, and there beheld great and terrible marvels—"

"These reports are then true?" she interrupted with curiosity.

"The half is not told. And later I was admitted to speech of the Holy Hubilgan, and even before I spoke, he knew my errand by his wisdom. And he said this: 'You will not find the treasure. It is disposed of.' Sacred Majesty, my heart was lead within me. What could this inferior person say? How should I dare to question the Holy Hubilgan? But he condescended to tell me it was secreted in the ruined city of Karakorum, and that when I returned to Peking I should learn where it is now."

Silence. And then my master spoke with stern brevity:

"It is in the treasure vaults of her sacred Majesty, the Empress."

As I almost started from my knees in astonishment, I caught the swift look of fear on her face. It vanished in perfect composure. Silence again. Then she spoke:

"By what wisdom, Blind Man of Hupei, have you known this?"

"By the wisdom vouchsafed to me through my studies, Motherly Benevolence, and in ways the uninstructed cannot follow. A young man was sent to the answerer of questions in the Village of the Aged Duck, and learning the answer to the riddle of 'The Thousand Wise Men,' he collected his servants in Peking and rode to the Tara Lamasery, scarcely halting for night or food, and he reached there twenty-four days before this disciple. So, being instructed by the Holy Hubilgan, who sent with him a wise lama, he reached the broken city of pride and there beneath the tomb of the Hutuktu Maydari was the treasure, guarded by a set bow with poisoned arrows after the manner of the Chinese. And at the opening of the door the flight of arrows struck him and he died. But by order of the Holy Hubilgan the treasure was collected and sent to your Majesty and it contains jewels uncountable and great emeralds and the Pearl of Good Omen and much more. So your Majesty has achieved your desire; but since this disciple has done his utmost, and it is because of his jade dragon that your Majesty has become possessed of the secret, let him receive the rewards promised."

He spoke with authority. Superstitious to the last fibre of her being, she shuffled and hesitated, looking

first at the Empress Consort and then at Li Lien-ying. The Empress Consort took up the word.

"This dutiful daughter fails to see that the success is owing to the disciple Yuan. Surely his wisdom is small, for the vision he enabled the Benevolent Mother to see in no way indicated the Tara Lamasery. If it had not been—" She stopped, as if she had said more than she meant, but the Empress laughing in triumph broke in:

"Do you ask, wise disciple, how I bethought me of 'The Thousand Wise Men'? Listen, blind man! Listen, wise disciple! All the wisdom of the world is not bound up in one small camel load, nor do all the flowers of the world grow in one garden! I wakened from the sleep of vision into which the skill of the disciple Yuan sent me, and as in a dream I heard a voice and it said this: 'The Thousand Wise Men could not have told her more.' Therefore, as wisdom comes in the company of the wise, I acted on this hearing, and the rest you have told, though how you knew it I cannot tell. As to reward—the disciple Yuan has not earned it, for he did not discover the treasure. But he shall have his life, because the treasure was forgotten until he and his jade dragon fell in our way. And let him be discreet and cautious in our service or punishment, not reward, may follow."

She flashed round on me like lightning:

"How did you learn of 'The Thousand Wise Men'? Answer!"

I had had a saving moment of thought while she spoke.

"In vision, Great Ruler of the World. An old man who said: 'Ask The Thousand Wise Men where is the treasure of Ho.'"

She stopped, baffled a moment, then shrewdly:

"Was that the old man?" pointing to the blind master.

"So far as I know he did not know where the treasure lay. But, having found it, Great Empress, why this anger? Could your servants do more?"

"I am not angry. I am amused that I, working only by earthly means, have been wiser than you and your master with the Great Wise Spirits for your servants. Now go—until I send for you again."

My master spoke with the perfect composure which never left him:

"Great Empress, there is one thing I must needs say and you hear. Because you feigned the sleep of vision to entrap the disciple Yuan and thereby mocked the Great Wise Spirits, that treasure shall bring a curse and no blessing. And be not angry that I say this, for it is not I, but the Law that cannot change. I have spoken. Though a poison be drunk in ignorance yet it poisons. You have meddled with what was above you. The consequence follows as his shadow follows the man. Evil days are upon the Great Pure Dynasty."

Seemingly it made no impression, but I saw the hand laid on the chair tremble so that the diamonds in the long nail sheaths flashed angry fires.

She looked at us laughing hardily, and we got ourselves out in the usual servile fashion. There could be no doubt of two things: First, that her Majesty was immensely pleased with herself; second, that she meant to keep me under observation.

CHAPTER XVII

NOT a safe word could we utter to each other until, in spite of the piercing cold, I got my master into his robe lined with sheepskin and out into the wintery garden where the marble gleamed coldly white as the snow I had come through. There instantly and swiftly I gave him the message of the Holy Hubilgan, telling him what I could of that strange time.

"It is well," he said. "I, too, have heard across the dark. He judged it well, disciple, that the woman should have the treasure, since the other half was secure. For the Holy One knew that with these great riches in her hand she would continue to cheat the Allies and flout Europe and enrich her minions, and so fill up the cup of her iniquities and follies. Already she has heaped Li Lien-ying with riches, and others even less worthy. And in the South vengeance is growing as snowflakes fall softly one by one, and then roar downward in an avalanche of fury. She is doomed and her dynasty, and this treasure makes swifter the day of destruction. But, disciple, did I not say that evil would come of playing with the mysteries? Did I not say a curse would follow? You cheated the woman and she was the cleverer at that bad game. For she cheated you more skilfully. She feigned the sleep of vision. She heard all you said, laughing inwardly and watching, and those careless words to me she grasped, and now the treasure is lost and your

life in urgent danger. And not your life only, but the sweet lady's."

The fool that I had been! The dupe! I had endangered his life and Sië's and all our hopes, because I must needs be wise in my own conceit! I had said enough to lose the treasure and might have easily in my blind folly have said more and plunged us all into utter ruin. I hung my head in shame and silence, outwitted and outplayed at my own game.

"No, no, disciple," he said kindly. "Who is above mistake? Who is the fool but he who will not learn? But you have learned. If I could have warned you, 'riding on the wind,' as we promised, I would have done it, but your mind was too busy. Now what is to be done? I know the woman. She will play with you and use the Lady Sië still to search you for secrets, and then one day when you least think it, she will strike and that day be your last. I have considered of all this. Escape this very night and go back to your own people. Be John Mallerdean again. If my blind eyes weep to lose you, what is that? This is your sole hope."

"I will never leave you if you care to keep so worthless a disciple," said I. "And the Lady Sië! I will never leave her. My place is here."

"Disciple, I have seen her much in your absence and have instructed her in many things. She is of a great courage and full of woman's wisdom. She it was who told me the woman boasted that she feigned the sleep. But if you die she will die also. Go, therefore, and instantly, and I, remaining here, will protect her, and speak with you; and one day you shall steal her and hide her

away from here until the Empress is gone, and then comes her great day and yours. This can be done. Trust me."

I asked if he knew who she was in reality.

"Of late I have learned it. The Holy Hubilgan counselled me to turn my sight that way, and then I saw. Disciple, out here we must not linger. They will distrust us. In the dark of this very night, before they believe it possible, you must be gone. For the lady's sake."

"But you, beloved master, are you safe?"

"Safe and in honour, for it is I who was the means of her returning to Peking; and, seeing its immediate success, she does not consider the future. Had she stayed in Shansi and summoned men to the succor of the dragon, she had saved her dynasty and lost China for another fifty years. But this I would not have, and here she is. The Emperor besought her, but she would not hear. No, all is well for me. Now, without word with the lady, for the Empress must still trust her— Go!"

Nothing could shake his steadfast resolution, though I knew he had suffered in my absence from strange and untrustworthy attendance. I knew also, however, and better than ever since my Mongolian journey, that he had strange and wonderful supports that even yet I could not understand. He walked companioned, even in utter loneliness.

We sat talking of such things as we desired to reach the Empress until it was very late, and then he went to rest, and I sat up reading until I was certain the patience of any watcher would be wearied out.

In matters like this the simplest, most accountable way is better than all the plotting in the world, and at one

o'clock in the cold January morning, I opened the door quietly, walked openly through the deserted ways into the Ning Shou Court, where, knowing Chinese ways, I was pretty certain the men on guard would be taking things easily. They were. One stirred drowsily in his sleep and questioned me. He knew me well by sight, and I had but to say my master, the Blind Man of Hupei, was ill, and I was sent by him for a rare medicament which alone would relieve his pain.

"And if you go off duty in my absence, though it will be short, say to the man who relieves you that I return swiftly and must not be delayed a moment at the gates."

I showed him the pass from the Empress which had been given me at Tai-Yuan, and passed out head high without fear or favour. It was not long before I was in the wholesome outer world that went its way outside the dark precincts of the palace.

That night an unobtrusive Hakka gentleman entered the temple on the outskirts of Peking, where I had formerly made the change that fitted me for these adventures. Next morning, before it was light, John Mallerdean of the Customs left it unseen and proceeded to his rooms near the French Legation, and the Hakka gentleman had vanished into thin air. But John Mallerdean kept the pass of the Empress, for having served him already it might serve him again.

My master was right. The only way was to make my escape before the Empress had time to mature her plans, and Sië's must be achieved also.

I lay low for a bit and got on with the arrears of work that the Boxer business had cast to the winds, and they

were heavy enough for us all. Only one of my friends had a faint glimmering that I was having an interesting time while they were all boxed up in the legation, and I could trust him to keep a close tongue in his head.

But for me, grinding away at my desk, life had become profoundly interesting, for I saw that quite apart from the treasure of Ho, apart from Sië, apart from the strange occult experiences, I had been entangled in the fringe of a vast and far-reaching conspiracy against the Manchus. They were falling, not only by the weight of their own transgressions, but by the will of the majority of the people. That conspiracy ramified through many of the wisest men in the Empire. It spread out through Mongolia into Tibet and farther. All the people with whom I had been brought into intimate contract were at the heart of it. For the blind man was the mainspring of it all. How little I had imagined this at first! It had seemed to me that every interest was concentrated on the treasure. Now I perceived that was only one small strand in the great warp and woof of the shroud that was slowly enfolding the Manchus and their power that it might lay them in the tomb of lost days and forgotten dynasties.

The treasure! Would Sië use a part of it to further these new aims? Strange indeed and a wild justice if that treasure were used to work the ruin of the tyrants who had done its original owner to death. How I longed to see her, no tongue can tell. In ordinary cases if lovers cannot meet they can write, but now there was nothing. I could only trust her immense fidelity not to misunderstand my flight.

I had moments when the whole thing seemed a wild impossibility. Sië a granddaughter of the Empress!—how in the world could I even hope to make her mine? And the treasure in the Tiger's Den—how in the world could I ever move it? I could make surreptitious visits like Ali Baba to the Robbers' Cave, but even that would be uncommonly difficult, and the frequent visits either of an Englishman or of a native to the priest of the Temple of the August Peace would very soon invite imperial notice and bring ruin on him and on us all. Never had I so needed the blind man's wisdom as when I was utterly cut off from it, and though I tried night after night to get in touch I always failed.

Hard lines to go about my work with all this in my mind, and about me the muttering and seething of the vast city all a-bubble with conspiracy and deferred hope!

In the secrecies of the palace none could tell what was germinating—not a word, not a sign would ever reach the outer day but by the will of the Empress. How had she taken my flight? Were they seeking me night and day? I tried to put myself in her place and failed.

Silence, and it might be a black Finis written to all my hopes.

Once or twice I met Li Lien-ying carried in his sedan chair, and contemptuously regarding "the Hundred Families," as the people are called in China. Once or twice he fixed with the malignant gaze he kept for foreigners, the tall Englishman, who passed him head in air. No likeness to the disciple Yuan struck his suspicion. All was well. And yet though I loathed him, I would have given much to know what he knew of Sië.

How was she bearing this silence and separation? Well, he would not know that. The entrance to such hearts is not for the likes of Li Lien-ying.

What drove me half mad was the court the Allies were paying to the Empress. They fancied her the handle by which they could move China and figuratively licked her feet. She knew it and laughed in her embroidered sleeve. She received their ladies with an exquisite half-melancholy grace, saying with what pleasure she dwelt on the memories of past meetings. She permitted a foreign artist to paint her picture and it was conveyed with almost divine honours through the streets of Peking on its way to the Exhibition in America. She pitted the Allies one against the other and scored every time.

Knowing what I knew, it sickened me. But knowledge of the facts of palace life would not have moved the diplomatists who expect no better from an Oriental ruler. What *would* have moved them was what I could not tell them—namely, that she counted no longer, that every day the power was departing from her, and that the right men to negotiate with were men whose names they had never heard. But naturally the day for speaking was not yet, and I, admitted into this knowledge by such strange circumstances, was on my honour to guard a secret which would cost lives invaluable to the hope of China. I remember at the club saying one night to a man high in the diplomatic service:

"Did it ever occur to you that there is a strong feeling against the Old Buddha in the popular mind and that you may be wasting your sweet nothings in that direction?"

"Nonsense, old man. She was never so popular. The Chinks think she's done us all in the eye, and I'm not sure but what they're right."

"So far as that goes, I believe they are. But supposing she has done herself in the eye too? What about the execution of Yang Lien and patriots of that type?"

"Forgotten. She has only to give their spirits a posthumous decoration and the people are satisfied. That woman has saved the Manchu dynasty for another hundred years."

"I disagree with you. I think if you dealt sternly with her now, you would recognize a new force in China that would range itself for civilization and prosperity. She never will."

"Sorry to disagree with a man who knows his China, but you're wrong, Mallerdean. The Empress is the only man in China—the only way to get anything done for opening it up."

I could say no more. The Allies flattered the Empress, and the Empress spent what was spared from her own uses of the treasure of Ho on fomenting plots against them, and the day of hope for China was deferred—long deferred.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was now March and the spring beginning to stir among the roots and I had not heard a word from the palace. I was sitting in my diggings one night anxious and disquieted, revolving all these things, when suddenly I was aware of a tension in the air like that which precedes an electric storm, a tightening of the temples, a tingling of the blood—the sort of confusion in the brain that precedes sleep. It was not the calm slipping away into unconsciousness which I knew at the hands of my master, but something urgent, alarming, perplexing. I had learned much even since leaving the palace and I recognized the signs. My heart laboured, my veins swelled, the temples beat unbearably. I struggled no longer. I lapsed into passive submission and sank into the darkness as a man into deep water. It covered me, I was submerged.

The darkness thinned. I saw a bright circle of light that covered the whole wall of my room and in it, with the clearness of a lantern slide, a picture—the unforgotten room of the Holy Hubilgan at Tara. Bright as the circle was, I looked into dimness, for the room was scarcely lit and the reincarnated one, all in white and sunk in white like a snowdrift, seemed to diffuse what light there was about him. I saw the black glittering jewels of his eyes fixed on me. The lips moved. I heard a thin far-off voice like the wind that wails in the deserts

of Mongolia. I no longer thought whether it was English he spoke or I heard. I understood. That was all that mattered.

"To-morrow go to the Lama Temple and receive instructions."

Nothing more. I remember I either thought or said "Obedience!"

The white figure raised a hand either in blessing or command. I saw the green gleam on the thumb. I saw the chin drop on the hand in the pose I remembered also, and the face fix itself on the future, awful and remote. Then it all faded. The room was dark and empty.

A dream? Never for one moment did I think so. I knew I was in the midst of great events swayed by men who control powers little known to the multitude. I was for the great Lama Temple of Peking.

I got up instantly and went off to see my chief and resign my position. I could not tell him the reason for I did not know it myself. I only knew it was a thing that must be done, cost what it might, and it cost more than a little. He argued, persuaded, remonstrated, offered leave, was kindness itself, but I persisted. I knew, and could not tell why, that it was a thing which had got to be done, and done it was.

Then I went off to my secret temple and a Chinese gentleman equipped for a journey spent the night there, and took curious and valuable information from the priest for conveyance where he thought I was going.

At eight next morning I was at the Lama Temple with a bag in my hand, and all my belongings left ready packed in my rooms. There are few more extraordinary

places in the world. It is a branch of the greatest Mongolian lamasery, and about fifteen hundred lamas are sheltered there, one class of them devoted to the study of nature from the exterior and related occult points of view, the second to sacred literature, the third to the study of the heavens and their influence on the earth, the fourth to the study of healing and herbal drugs. And while a good deal emanates from them at which our scientific pundits might laugh, there is more which our pundits could certainly not explain. By no means every one, whether native or foreign, is welcome in the Lama Temple. Indeed there are times when it is dangerous to enter at all, for many of the lamas are wild men from the Mongolian and Tibetan deserts and they have their own views and their own way of expressing them. It is the strangest place in Peking.

The Sacred Throne is always uncommonly courteous to the inmates of the Lama Temple for excellent reasons connected with its dominion in Mongolia and Tibet, and the vast influence exerted by the Peking brotherhood. But I, though I have not mentioned it before, had paid my respects both before and after my visit to the Tara Lamasery. I knew my way.

I went at eight, for at nine all the Yellow-Robed would be flocking to matins, and passing through one of the arches shining with its imperial-yellow tiles, went and stood by the four-sided monumental tablet which tells the story of Lamaism in four languages, Tibetan, Mongol, Chinese and Manchu. There I waited, listening to the distant chanting of the lamas in the Temple of the Great Perfect One of the Future—the Buddha who is to come.

And as I stood, a lama came up and passed me by, casting a sharp glance at me, then returned and stood before me.

"It is the disciple Yuan," he said.

I bowed.

"Holy Sir, the unworthy disciple salutes your wisdom, but I desire to say that I am not at present the disciple Yuan for reasons. I am the Chinese Won Ting."

"That is understood, but it was needful to be certain. Last night came a message from the Holy Hubilgan of Tara, informing us that you would be here. I have a message in charge for you also from His Holiness."

"It shall be humbly received. I myself beheld the Holy One last night."

He looked at me with interest. He was a young man with well-cut features, covered with the impassive calm that hides all secrets, that nothing can penetrate. A remarkable man, I thought then, and I was not mistaken. I have heard of him again of late years in a connection I dare not reveal.

"You are then high in favour. The Holy One does not lightly show himself. But you are the disciple of the Blind Man of Hupei." (He made a gesture of deep reverence.) "I have it in charge to say to you—*this*."

A pause, while he looked gravely at me as if measuring my forces. Then he resumed.

"The blind man has been ill for many days, owing to a powder administered by those who shall not be mentioned. His death is not intended, that is certain, but it was wished that he should be unable to communicate with you and with one of the Court ladies who is his

disciple. We have this from one in the palace who is the slave of the Holy Incarnations at Lhasa and Tara. It is truth. But because these Great Ones know that for a time the blind man cannot protect her, it is determined to remove this Court lady from attendance on the Empress who treats her with such severity that it is feared her departure to the Yellow Springs (death) is contemplated."

The blood rushed to my face. Terrible tidings for me! So that was why I had not heard. My master, ill and helpless, Sië exposed to cruelty and death!— She was useless now the Empress had, as she believed, secured the whole of the treasure. And she knew secrets, many and weighty; she was a danger. Desperate thoughts rose in my mind. I turned my face to the Forbidden City, but the lama anticipated my thoughts.

"Have no fear. The faithful one in the palace carries out the instructions of the Holy Hubilgan and each day gives the powder of healing which slays all poison and the blind man rests peacefully. For the lady it is more urgent. For certain reasons beside her safety the Holy One desires her presence. Therefore last night, to the Empress, and all who surround her, was administered the diamond powder of sleep, and the faithful one led down this lady and with trustworthy attendants sent her to the Pass of Nankow, returning to the palace to watch over the blind man. It is the desire of the Holy One that you ride with her to the Tara Lamasery. And have no fear for the blind man, for all is well. The span of his life is nearly eight years, and his reincarnation will be glorious. And it is in the mind of the

Holy Hubilgan that you have been faithful and that your love for the blind man is a thing commendable in earth and heaven, and therefore you sit at the feet of his protection. Take this as a sign that so it is."

He laid in my hand a ring with a purple stone deep cut with the holy swastika, and put it on my hand.

"Now go in haste, for at the Hsichi-men station the train leaves in fifty minutes and it is better that you go thus than in another way the woman yonder might trace. Go, remembering that this ring will open the way for you through Mongolia and Tibet and farther; and when you show it to any you would confer with, repeat these words—"The Jewel in the Lotus," and all will be well. Here you are always welcome." He bowed and turned away and I hurried to the gate, wild with hope and wonder.

CHAPTER XIX

THREE hours later I stood in the great archway of Chu-yun-Kwan with the heavy white marble panels gloriously sculptured, which for so many centuries have watched the wild and wonderful life of the old Nankow Pass. Away through the great wall go the caravans to Mongolia, Tibet, Turkestan, Sungaria, and many more strange places. For thousands of years these caravans have travelled into the darkness of ages and are lost to the memory of man. Still they go on their toilsome way to—nothingness, a wild and touching sight. But my eyes and ears were sealed. I could only watch a drove of camels silently undulating toward me, one fitted for the riding of woman, and there I stood rigid until a party of eight men, one of them a lama, the rest, guards following the camels, entered the archway and with them two women—with veils thrown over their heads and ready for the road. The lama approached me, and I raised my hand with the gleaming stone and repeated the words—"The Jewel in the Lotus." His face relaxed into a half smile, and Sië threw aside her veil, her faithful eyes on mine.

She made a quick movement with her hands—no more, then bowed gravely. I knew the Oriental etiquette of the aloofness of the sexes, so strong in China that people who keep the old customs scarcely approve of the clothes of men and women being hung on the same peg! So I

followed suit, knowing my chance would come and soon. And after all, a good deal can be said with looks when nothing better is available. There was no time for anything more. The lama gave the word to mount and ride swiftly. Indeed they had only delayed for me, for when Sië was missed from the palace the hue and cry would be out over Peking. The Empress had excellent reasons for keeping her under her eye.

So the camels were set to their best speed, and splendid beasts they were, tall, powerful and perfectly trained. We devoured the leagues, and once in the Land of Grass and with our experienced Mongol guard there was little fear of pursuit, for we could leave the beaten track and plunge into the mountains. It troubled me to think of my Sië in the filthy inns along the route, but I might have spared my anxiety. The Holy Hubilgan has a long arm in Mongolia, and the lama told me he had a system of yurtas (tents) laid along two alternative routes that the lady might not suffer.

There were sufferings which could not be avoided, however, for the wind had a knife edge of cold, and every now and then light snow showers fell on the drift-edged way. But she was furred to the tip of her dainty nose. I could see nothing but two star-bright eyes looking my way, and as to her courage— Well, I have said what I think of that already. It was as strong and pliable as wrought steel springs. Her camel was specially chosen for its easy gait, and when we dismounted for food she declared she was enjoying the wonderful free air after the caged life of the Court.

We walked a little apart from the busy group light-

ing the fire of argols, and at a respectful distance her woman followed. I sprang at my chance.

"Sië, I have spoken with you often, but I have never said I loved you in so many words. Yet you know it, is it not so?"

Only the bright eyes in the drift of white fur met mine—but bravely.

"My cousin, I know it. The love of the family is strong in my country, but that you should feel it for a stranger and one so far off in blood—"

"That love is very well; it is a duty, but it is not the love I feel for you. You are not truly my cousin. We are many generations apart. Yet I love you so much that the sun is dark when I do not see you. You are my life to me—my only hope."

She looked down then, and in a voice of infinite sadness said:

"I have no friends, no kindred. I am alone."

I did not enlighten her on that point. The time was not yet.

"Sië, is it only as a cousin that you love me? One can certainly live one's life contentedly without one's cousins. Can you be content if I go away and you see me no more?"

I saw two large tears gather and bead on her black lashes. No more was needed.

"In my country," I said, "when a man asks a woman if she can love him, if she will be his wife, she answers Yes or No like a queen, for she is her own to give or withhold. I love you. I ask you to be my wife—equal

with me in every right of love and honour. But yet—before you answer, hear this."

For I thought it right to repeat what I knew the blind man had told me of her great and almost terrible riches and the power it would give her in the world and in the future of her country. I told her that what I possessed was as dust in comparison. There was nothing left unsaid on those heads for it was right she should know. Only her position with regard to the Old Buddha I concealed, for I knew in her great self-sacrifice she would dread to expose me to the risks that alarming factor might bring.

She heard me with the courtesy of an Oriental woman —no exclamation, no word; then, when I paused, she spoke modestly and firmly:

"My lord" (I noticed the "cousin" was dropped), "you have spoken. I have heard. What are riches? To me nothing. You offer me love. I have never had it. Honour—it has never come my way. Truth—I have never heard it until I saw you and the blind master. Fidelity. I have heard there was such a thing, but never dreamt I should meet it. I have had loneliness, cruelty, untruth and evil for my daily portion. My lord, you offer me such riches that my heart trembles and I cannot count them. What is gold, what are jewels? What are the blood-stained treasures of my family? I am your servant at your feet, and if you lift me to your heart, my whole life shall bless and thank you."

I may write her words, but cannot write her lovely sub-

missive sweetness, yet with passion and fire shot through it. Surely the most beautiful things in the world can only be beheld but never described. In silence a man must adore what he cannot wholly comprehend—the proud submission of a noble woman. It was vain for me to tell her that my place was at *her* feet. She persisted and still persists that she was a prisoner, and that I had set her free to life and love and hope, that to me she owed all. "Even in dreams I come to you!" she said.

We had many talks on that strange eventful journey, with the fitful sun breaking through snow clouds and the faint tokens of spring stirring in the air. Every day she blossomed more beautiful—all quick fire and life, a lovely rose of the desert. Even the old lama noticed it. He said, quaintly enough, one day:

"When the Blessed Ananda inquired of the Excellent One what should be the attitude of the monk to women, he replied in his superhuman wisdom—'Do not look their way, Ananda!' And yet, worthy disciple of a great man, there are moments when I think that as a man may look at a flower and marvel at the Great Law which created its beauty, so also may he look at such a flower as that lady, rejoicing in the Law that made a creature so fair and kind!"

I recognized a train of thought not too common in the Orient and responded eagerly, and I observed that the old lama always had the tent which he and I occupied set close to that of Sië and her woman, so that if ever a dog howled or a camel cried he could reassure her in-

stantly—a fatherly trait that was touching enough in its way. He surrounded her with service.

So, at last we rode round the corner I remembered so well, and the Tara Lamasery opened before us and the cliff honeycombed with images of the many Holy Ones looking down upon us in splendid colours that flashed in the afternoon sunshine. The Peking lama, all smiles, stood ready to greet me, and the long journey was done.

I shall never forget Sië's delight and awe as she looked about her, not a fear, not a doubt troubling her clear eyes —uncaged at last and free.

Every preparation had been made—a little cottage, if so I may call it, with two kindly Mongol women to attend her, was set apart just outside the gate of the great court, and a Gelung waited with a special scarf of blessing sent her by the Holy Hubilgan. These little silk scarfs are an etiquette in Mongolia and Tibet which can never be missed when courtesy is intended. The old lama had foreseen all this, and Sië and I were also provided with the necessary scarfs for presentation on ceremonial occasions.

I stood by to see her installed, not daring to enter, and then went off to the rooms I had had before, the Peking lama talking earnestly all the way.

"A high, a remarkable honour, noble traveller. Tomorrow at sunset the Holy Hubilgan will receive you. His solitude is great, and if we, the ignorant ones, may judge, noteworthy events are pending. It is certain that in the lamasery at this moment is a high envoy from his Ocean Greatness, the Dalai Lama of Lhasa, and that the

Incarnate Buddha of Tashi-Lumpo is also represented. Sleep in peace, honoured one. By the command of the Holy One, all in the lamasery is at your service."

I looked out at the frosty stars that night—the glittering constellations on their eternal way, pledges of immutable law, and my heart went up in thankfulness that my Sië was safe from pursuit, fenced not only by true hearts and hands, but by the terrible mountains, plains and deserts that guard the route between China and British India. If I could but know all was well with my beloved master I could have but the one wish left —that Sië were mine for ever.

I turned in and slept in dreamless peace.

As the sun was setting came my summons, and guided by the awed Peking lama I threaded my way to the Holy Hubilgan's reception room.

CHAPTER XX

AS before, it was dim and faintly lit, mysterious shadows heaping the corners, and the one pale light focussed on the startling whiteness of the reincarnated saint's robe and white concentrated face where all the life seemed burning in the jewel-black eyes. There was dead stillness, a conventual calm as if the world lay far away and forgotten outside, but I knew very well that this was not so and that the keenest worldly anxieties were disturbing his mind and those of the two men who stood one on either hand—the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the Incarnate Saint of Tashi-Lumpo. The three men I saw before me may be said to have held the destinies of Asia in their hands, for with China heaving like a waterlogged ship helpless in a storm, the casting vote is theirs and theirs only.

The Peking lama disappeared humbly and the door was made fast and I was alone with the three.

Whether they spoke English I cannot tell. All that is blurred to me. I cannot tell. I only know there was no doubt on either side as to what was said and answered. These men have their means.

It began with a courteous greeting from the Holy Hubilgan and the hope that the journey had been made as easy as possible for the lady and myself. I said all that was grateful.

"It was needful," pursued the Holy One, with those unflickering eyes on my face, "that she should be brought

here for more reasons than one. In the first place he whom you know as the Blind Man of Hupei notified us that her life was no longer safe. There were persons at the Court of Peking who wished her removed, and he had no means of protecting her. She is the owner of the treasure of Ho which is concealed by The Flying Tiger river, is she not?"

I assented—they knew everthing. What was there to hide? The two men stood stiffly beside him. He went on:

"It is known to us that you would marry this lady. What is her mind? Is she willing?"

"Willing and ready. I will guard her as a trust more precious than the treasure she owns."

"The blind man assures us that she will be safe in your hands. It is now time to speak plainly. He assures us also that in all things you have proved yourself faithful and courageous, a worthy initiate. You are aware that the Manchu dynasty is doomed and that Mongolia and Tibet will work out their own destinies, relieved from a hateful yoke?"

"I know and sympathize. Though I believe that a great federation of interests between China and the two is probable later on."

"We also believe this. But the time is not yet. Freedom first, and we can then meet the Empire as equals. Now, what I would say is this. We have amassed much treasure, much wealth, for much is needed for this great purpose, and these lands of gold and jewels have poured their wealth like grain at the feet of the leaders. But we need more. If you marry this woman, are you con-

tent to devote a part of her treasure to the freeing of Mongolia and Tibet?"

I had no need for thought to delay my answer; besides, I think I had foreseen this in the Lama Temple in Peking.

"What my wife owns is hers. I have no claim on the least jewel of it all. But if she wishes to give any or all, I support her in all she does, and her will is mine."

The Holy Hubilgan looked approval. The two men nodded. He touched a curiously embossed bell on his table, and the Peking lama reappeared, bowed to the earth with humility and fear.

"Bring with you the lady of the Chinese Court and return quickly."

When the door closed, he resumed:

"Noble man, I tell you for your joy that the blind man is recovered, and that the Manchu woman believes the Lady Sië is dead. A body was recovered at Peking which the slave Li Lien-ying saw with his own eyes, and this is now believed. There will be no further pursuit. We have controlled this."

I heard it with a thankfulness I did not conceal. Why should I? These men were on our side, though I knew well by this time that Sië and I and all the world were but pawns in the great game they were playing. But how had this news outsped our swift journey from Peking? I knew. It rode on the wind, as my master said, and its wings were the wings of the great gales that roar along the steppes.

The door opened and Sië entered alone—a light veil flung over her head.

At once, seeing the Holy One, she knelt in all duty and reverence with folded hands and bowed head. I fancied that even the hard intelligence of his face softened as he saw the slender figure.

"Rise, daughter of the Excellent One, and draw nearer," he said in softer tones. "And have no fear, for great Powers have watched and will watch over your safety. The cage door is opened. You are free."

She rose and drew near and knelt again, and the Holy One motioned me to bring a cushion, since she would not leave her humble position. I stood beside her, and he spoke once more.

"Daughter of the Perfect One, the Blind Man of Hupei has instructed you in the evil doings of the Manchu rulers, and the hope of China and these outer countries which are faithful to the Three Jewels—the Lord, the Law, and the Assembly. Now listen to the words of him who will be your lord while he tells you our request. But do not doubt that whatever your will may be, we respect it. The treasure of Ho is yours, to give or withhold, for this new order is founded on justice, and of fraud or force we will have none."

As briefly as I could I explained to her the position of affairs and much more than I have told here or can ever tell of the blind man's hopes for the final affiliation of China with her sister nations (still subject nations) of Mongolia, Tibet, and the rest. Here and there the Holy Hubilgan prompted me when I hesitated, and in a short time the whole case was set fairly and squarely before her. Very modestly and quietly she asked a question here and there, mastering the subject thoroughly,

which of course her previous knowledge from the blind man enabled her to do without much difficulty. Then she rose and stood beside me with joined hands and bent head. I can hear her soft voice still:

"Holy One and wise men, how is it possible that I should hesitate? I say truth in telling you that when I knew the treasure was recovered by this noble person who will be my lord, I consecrated it to my country. Take it, therefore. Use it according to your inspired intelligence and this is my free will, with the assent of my lord-to-be. But may a humble woman speak in the presence of the wise? Is it not possible to reclaim a part of the treasure which is mine and which the Empress wastes on evil doings? I would give it all to this great cause."

The Holy Hubilgan smiled a little with his eyes.

"Noble daughter, when the treasure was sent to the Empress a part, and not the least, was reserved until your pleasure concerning it should be known to us. What was sent has sped her on the road of destruction as your ancestor Ho would have chosen. Therefore be at peace. And now I would have you know that here and at Lhasa has your past been deciphered and that this noble person and you are most truly one. In past lives this was begun. In future lives it will continue. Have then no fear, for though in the flesh he is not of your land, in the spirit you are one, and so will continue, and in both your veins runs the blood of the race of John Mallerdean."

We stood before him like children. Where was the end to his knowledge?

"Also even across the dark your soul can visit his. This is true wedlock. But now, daughter, speak your will concerning the treasure."

"Holy One, take it all. Would that it were more. I need none. Surely this humble daughter of the Excellent One will rejoice that she is found worthy to make the offering."

They looked at her with surprise and almost tenderness, so sweet were her generous grace and humility. The Holy One, more human than I have yet seen him, took up the word.

"Daughter, your heart is a white lotus of the Lord. It shall be done as you say, and as this your lord wills, for his witnessed consent is also needful in our eyes."

He paused, looking keenly at me.

"What share I have in my wife's treasure I freely give," I said. "What she judges best for her country I judge best. Be it as she says. And, moreover, she and I, who owe safety and life itself to Your Holiness, owe a great debt, and it shall be paid thus and in true-hearted gratitude also."

There was an instant's silence. The taller of the two men spoke, in a deep low voice like the muffled sounding of a bronze gong.

"On behalf of his Ocean Greatness I declare that the Lady Sië, generous of heart, should retain the glorious emeralds, the pearls and the sapphires, and whatever else she may choose, that there may be great wealth left in her hands for the helping of the cause with her own wisdom."

The other man continuing as if in the same voice, spoke:

"It is the will of the reincarnate Buddha of Tashi-Lumpo that the lady retain this wealth and use it in her wisdom and that of her lord."

And the Holy Hubilgan finished the matter:

"It is also my will. Be it known to you, noble foreigner, that for a hundred years and more we have known of the treasure in the dead city of Karakorum and in the Tiger's Den, and we could have taken it when we would. But it is the word of all the Buddhas, 'Do no wrong. Be just in word and deed,'—and if we permitted the Manchu woman to take the half of the treasure it was that the other half might be preserved for this lady. But now we will send for it also to the Tiger's Den, and here before your eyes it shall be unveiled, and the division made. And meanwhile, if it is your will, I say let the marriage be made, that as man and wife you may act together in this great matter."

If any one had told me in former days that I should marry a Manchu lady of high degree, that the Holy Hubilgan of the Tara Lamasery would act as matchmaker for me, that the representatives of the Powers of Lhasa and Tashi-Lumpo would gravely approve, that the whole thing would be warp and woof of one of the most earth-shocking convulsions of modern times, what should I have said—what believed? But the irony of events outpaces fiction. As I tell it, it was. I can say no more.

We were married Chinese fashion with the joint worship of Heaven and Earth, and Mongol fashion with

the simulated capture of the bride, and in submitting to their custom Sië won every Mongol heart, and the news of her beauty and riches and patriotism, and the favour of the Holy One spread like wildfire down even to the borders of India. The caravans carried it, the returning envoys published it abroad. So beloved was she that they bestowed on her the name of Wen-Cheng, professing to believe her a reincarnation of the lovely Chinese princess Wen-Cheng, wife of the Tibetan king who there introduced Buddhism. I can safely say that such was her influence that she might have ridden jewelled and unattended through Mongolia and Tibet in perfect security and welcomed everywhere as a messenger of good.

I must gather up the threads of my story. The treasure was sent for and brought to the Tara Lamasery, and there, before the Holy Hubilgan were opened the leather box and the leather packets I had last seen in the green and water-resounding cave of the Tiger's Den. Sië and I looked on and marvelled as the splendours rolled into the light from their long imprisonment. There were pearls to deck all the mermaids of the China Sea, wonderfully wrought topaz and jade cups, jewels, jewels, jewels—need I describe them all? I had scarcely thought such wealth was on the face of the earth, whatever may be beneath it. With it came also the treasure of John Mallerdean which had been secreted in the loft behind the colossal golden Buddha. The Excellent One had guarded the trust well. There were the six great cabochon emeralds and all that I remembered. The

Karakorum wealth also. What would not Li Lien-ying and the Empress have given to dip their fingers in this mighty splendour tossed about the chamber of the Holy Hubilgan!

And now my surprise came.

These dignitaries in this wild remote place had their agents in India, and they in turn their agents not only in Europe, but all over the world. They knew with exactitude the best and most businesslike course to be taken in disposing of these wonderful gems. It was to be done gradually and with the most absolute discretion.

It was already known that a ready market for some of the most splendid would be found among the great princes of India.

To make a long story short, for this affair was spread over two years, Sië's share when realized amounted to about a million sterling. What the rest fetched I am under bond not to reveal for its use is just begun.

We might have ventured safely into China, always provided we kept out of Peking, for the old Empress had never a doubt of her granddaughter's death, but other work was appointed us before and during the Great War, and on that I must be silent for it touches as much on coming events as on the past. Much of the treasure of Ho was spent on the needs of the needy then, and of all the glory of jewels it was very characteristic of Sië that she kept but one jade pendant for her own use, and the little jade ring with its vein of rose which in the terrible palace I had first seen on her finger.

"A great lady needs no jewels," she said; and as my

wife she thought herself a great lady indeed. She was one, however, on other grounds—a princess of women.

As the Empress grew more arrogant, more dangerous, with increasing years, more tyrannical to the wretched Emperor, the blind man left her, and, travelling into the deserts, joined the Holy Hubilgan at the Tara Lamasery, where, still serving as his disciple, I acquired knowledge for which the world is not yet ripe, though the dawn is grey in the East. If ever there were a saint and a patriot it was he. If it were permitted to me to lay bare his knowledge and the deep wisdom he had gained from it, many would marvel, and science hand in hand with faith would receive a new impetus.

But this must wait the appointed day with other good things that are coming.

It is a strange fact that on the day the great Empress fulfilled the measure of her life, he also departed, tended to the last, by the faithful hands of Sië and by mine. I give his last words:

"I depart in great peace and joy to the Heaven of the Buddha that is to be, he who in his coming shall bring peace and light to the world, and I await a glorious reincarnation."

"He is himself a Buddha-to-be in the due opening of the years," said the Holy Hubilgan, closing the sightless eyes with his own hands. And for the first and last time I saw his lips tremble. More than this of my master's history I have never known.

But this I believe to be true: The blind man will return.

What shall I say of my wife? How can a man praise his dearer self? I will say this and no more: When I think of the treasure of Ho, I remember that living precious treasure and nothing else.

THE END

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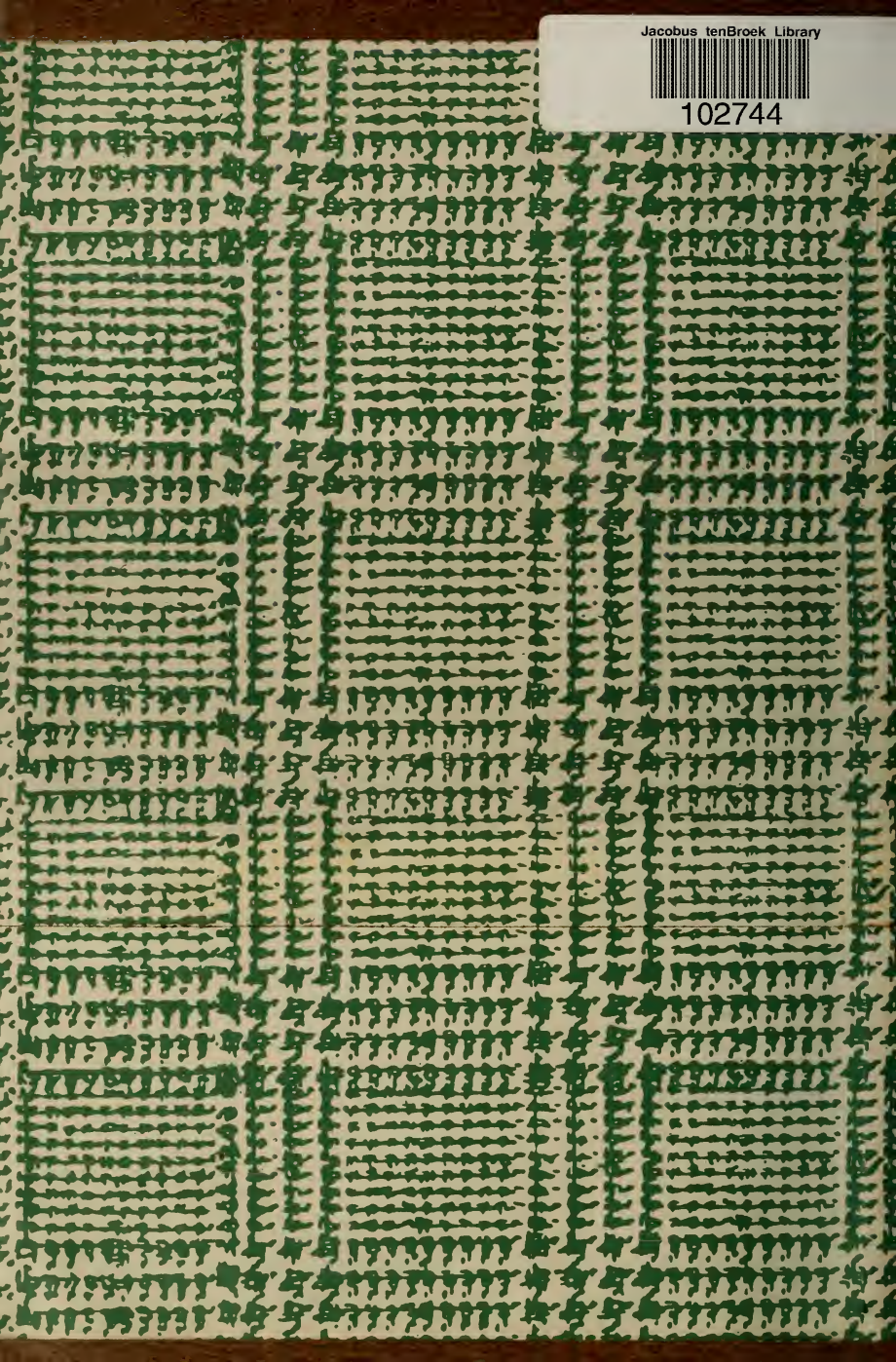
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